

Tom and I on the Old Plantation



By
Archibald Rutledge



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TOM AND I
ON THE OLD PLANTATION



"FIRE! FIRE! THE GREAT HOUSE IS BURNING!"—Page 196

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Archibald Rutledge

*Author of "Under the Pines," "The Banners of the Coast,"
"Old Plantation Days," etc.*

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS BY
B. J. ROSENMEYER



New York
Frederick A. Stokes Company
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TO
MY BROTHER
THOMAS PINCKNEY RUTLEDGE
THESE STORIES OF A LIFE WE LOVED
ARE DEDICATED

Afar in the forest I'm longing to rove,
Afar in the forest, the forest I love!
All dewy and fragrant at breaking of morn
To follow the hounds and the echoing horn.

Afar in the forest, O brother of mine,
Deep, deep in those wildwoods of oak and of pine,
I'm longing with you in our gladness to roam
Afar in the forest, the forest of home!

There joyous once more at daybreaking to ride
Through glimmering pinelands with you by my side;
When red is the east or when gold is the west,
Afar in the forest's the place we love best!

Afar in the forest are waiting our joys,
In regions romantic we loved so as boys;
And still for us now in the woods' wildest ways,
Afar in the forest, are happiest days.

Afar in the forest our hearts can find rest
From life's anxious troubles. O deep in my breast
I cherish the hope that with you I may roam
Afar in the forest, the forest of home!

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TOM AND I
ON THE OLD PLANTATION

Tom and I on the Old Plantation

I

SAVING THE RICE-CROP

HAMPTON plantation, on which it was my fortune to be born, is situated on the lower Santee River in South Carolina. There I spent the first twenty years of my life—years crowded with happy memories, with incidents and adventures, tragic, pathetic, and humorous. Here I wish to preserve only the best of those happenings, and by telling as simply as I can what befell my brother Tom, the negro boy Prince, and myself, to give a clear picture of those days and of our life on the plantation.

One of the most characteristic of our adventures was our battle with the rice-birds during the year of the great flood.

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Every summer, during the month of August, father used to leave the work on the plantation in charge of his overseer, an intelligent negro named Henry Snyder, and go to the mountains of North Carolina. He would return in time for the harvest in September. During his absence he could depend upon Henry to look after the crop satisfactorily.

In summer the plantation was not healthful, and we left it to live in a cottage on the sea-coast, ten miles away. When father was gone, Tom and I usually drove up to the plantation four or five times a week, not because we were needed there, but because we loved it.

There were alligators and wood-ducks to shoot in the river and in the pine-woods ponds; there was good fishing for perch and black bass in the rice-field canals; and there were delightful rambles through the thickets in search of blueberries, foxgrapes, and big, thick-skinned muscadines.

We also liked to go to the plantation in summer because of the dinners that Martha used to prepare. Martha was the wife of Will, the hostler, and had been our cook for twenty years.

She always gave us a chicken, and heaped dishes of snowy, smoking rice, sweet potatoes with the sugar oozing out on their jackets, boiled okra, and sweet corn, and an abundance of rich milk from cows that had been pasturing on the lush grasses along the river. For dessert we usually had a watermelon that one of the hands on the place had brought from the field early in the morning, and put in a barrel of water to cool.

After dinner we would read until the heat of the afternoon had passed, or talk with some of the negroes under the trees. An hour before sunset one of the men would hitch up the buggy, and we would start on our homeward drive through the scented woods. I shall never forget those drives under the pines and through the dusky, fragrant watercourses where the myrtle berries gleamed and the white-bay flowers glimmered in the twilight of the thickets. The road was level, and carpeted with pine-needles; and even the little creaking song of the singletree, as our roan racked along, is to me a pleasant memory.

Thus we passed the summers of many happy

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years, until that eventful summer when father, before going to the mountains, told us that we were to help Henry in managing the plantation. Little did he dream how great a help we should have a chance to render.

The rice-planter has three dread enemies: tornadoes, freshets, and rice-birds. There is no adequate protection against a tornado. High banks along the river, however, usually control the freshets, caused by excessive rains up-country; and there are various agencies for holding in check the rice-birds that stop over on their southward migration to feast in the ripening golden fields. Sometimes negro children patrol the banks, or negro "bird-minders" go down into the rice and shoot into the largest flocks. Sometimes it may be best to give up a poorly headed corner to the birds. As a rule, after they have been harried for four or five weeks, rice-birds will change their feeding-ground, and take themselves to the fields of some planter less energetic than his neighbors.

Tom and I had seen a tornado, and every year we saw the birds; once we had even seen a tornado and the birds together, but until

that summer we had never had the rice-birds and a freshet together on the eve of harvesting.

How well I remember that cool August morning! After turning the roan horse loose in the plantation pasture, we were preparing for a deer drive. We had cleaned our guns, which we had not used since February; we had looked in the old harness-room to see what we could find in the way of buckshot shells, and we had called up the hounds.

But we were not destined to carry out our plans. Before we were ready to start, Henry Snyder appeared, and told us that there was a rise in the river, and that from the color of the water, he looked for a big freshet. He seemed troubled, and we were glad to have him come to us for help.

"I heard the birds this morning, too," he said, in an anxious tone. "When I came across the Mainfield bank, they were lighting on the margins."

"Is there any danger from the freshet?" asked Tom.

"That Mainfield bank," Henry answered,

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with some pride, for he had superintended the building of it, "is good for a twelve-foot water, but I can't tell what's coming down the river."

"How about the birds?" I asked. "Is there plenty of powder and shot for them?"

Henry told us that the river steamer had brought six bags of Number 10 shot and a keg of black powder the week before. We consequently gave up the deer-hunt, to the keen disappointment of the hounds. We went first to the river, only a hundred yards behind the house, and saw its yellow water brimming from bank to bank, splotched with sedge and trash. It had lost its usual languorous appearance, and now flowed swiftly and silently, as if intent on some serious business.

We were convinced that there was trouble ahead, and went with Henry to the storehouse, where we got shot and powder with which to begin the defense against the birds.

Down at the Mainfield, a rich tract redeemed from the river-marshes and transformed into a rice-growing area by means of clearing and draining, we found a few scattered flocks of birds. We noticed also that the freshet water

was climbing into the dewberry vines lining the edges of the great bank that separated the field from the river. I wondered at the tremendous force that was behind that creeping water, and thought how helpless we should be if it ever rose a fraction of an inch above the bank. The birds were newcomers, and consequently shy; they preferred to go hungry rather than to risk being shot.

There was little we could do that day except watch the water as it rose, threatening the three-hundred-acre rice-crop. We counted the new flocks of birds as they came from the northeast, and planned to bombard them the following day, until they crossed the river to other rice-fields, or were forced to forage on the waste lands of the delta, or on the grass-fields of the uplands.

When we got to the plantation, shortly after sunrise the next morning, Henry met us with a frightened face.

"Water's way up, sir," he said. "I've got Primus and Lisbon throwing up a cap on the bank, but she's gone over Mr. Bellew's. I hear the Bellefield banks are gone, too. All last

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night I lay awake, listening to the water rolling over a break on Romney. As for the birds, I never saw the like of them. They darken the sky, and they just keep on coming from every side."

I am afraid we were not sorry to hear of the great numbers of rice-birds, for that meant rare sport for us. But the danger to the bank was another matter. When we reached the field, the vast yellow flood was sweeping on seaward, as far as we could see, unbroken except by a few strange-looking, half-drowned trees and the rocking tops of submerged canebrakes. It seemed to have engulfed all the world to the east of us, and its swollen surface was only a foot from the top of our bank. The temporary cap that the two negro boys were frantically throwing up from the rice-field looked worthless to me. The mud was soft, and of a sandy or "crawfish" variety.

If ever the freshet topped the bank, the rice would be doomed; for it was then in head, and to be sunk under heavy muddy water for several days would reduce it to a sticky, tangled mass, not only worthless, but an encumbrance

to the land. Still, the bank might be high enough and strong enough to keep the water out. We were sufficiently familiar with the plantations on both sides of the river to know that our Mainfield bank would stand if any bank would.

During the second day of the freshet Tom and I, each with a single-barreled breech-loading gun, guarded opposite sides of the big field. From time to time we shot a few birds. At last we became aware that, out in the open, vast flocks were feeding, undisturbed by all our firing. From across the river they came in increasing numbers, and there was no uncertainty about the place where they intended to stop. The sight mystified us, until Henry met us near the flood-gate. This was a huge trunk set midway across the bank, used in "flowing" the field when the crop needed it. The overseer was evidently less apprehensive about the freshet than about the birds.

"Boss men," he said to us, "we sure are going to get all the birds on the river. I know Mr. Manigault's banks went an hour ago. Can't you hear the water rolling over the Big Harry"

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—the nickname of a bank—"at Bellefield? All the rice-birds from those places will come to us. They can't get rice on a flowed field. I hear the water's dropping up at Elmwood; I don't think it will top this bank. But we will have to do a piece of shooting, or this rice will be eaten up completely."

It was not often that Henry made so long a speech, and we were impressed.

"What is the best thing to do?" Tom asked. "We haven't men enough on the place to watch 300 acres if the birds make up their minds to eat us out."

The negro, who had guarded the rice-crop through all its stages of growth, from the time when it had been sown broadcast in the black mud until now, when it was almost ready for the sickle, looked anxiously over the field, then up at the birds flocking in the sky.

"We must get down into the rice," he said. "We can't do much on the margins. While we are waiting here, they will clean out that prize fifteen-acre strip in the middle yonder."

He pointed in the direction of the spot; we could see the rice there shaking with myriads



"'WE MUST GET DOWN INTO THE RICE,' HE SAID"—Page 10

of feasters. Above us the birds continued to gather, until the very sky seemed alive, and the hot, still air was vibrant with the monotonous, metallic *pink-pank! pink-pank!* of their cries.

Far off in the field we got a view of the size of one of the flocks when it was momentarily disturbed by a sharp-shinned hawk that darted out of a cypress and sped across the open toward a pine-covered point of land. With a dull roar the birds rose in a dark cloud, flew over the golden rice, and settled once more out of sight. We knew that a flock of that kind could ruin an acre in a day, and that in ten days the myriads that had collected would get the better part of the whole crop. The rice-bird is a sad glutton, and will devour an incredible number of the soft, succulent grains. Perched on a rice-stalk, he will eat his fill; when he begins to feel uncomfortable, when his bill becomes clawed and sticky, he will hop and slide down the stem toward the water in which the rice stands. There he will drink, wash his beak, and so find himself ready for another feast. In the rice before us there were thousands of birds going

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the rice stood, and how fiercely the sun beat down on our heads and shoulders. As soon as we were in position, we began to shoot. Prince roused the birds in the middle of the field, and as the yellow hordes rose out of the rice, he poured a thunderous load into them. The vast flock, which numbered several thousand, scattered wildly; each bird flew its own way. Then individuals gathered into little bands, the bands formed flocks, and soon the great concourse was again united. I saw them coming toward me, actually darkening the morning sun. I stooped low in the rice, and when they had almost reached me, I rose suddenly, whooped to make them "ball," and shot into the blackest part of the cloud. They started across the river, but seeing no place to alight ahead of them, they turned up toward the Sam Hill Strand, where Tom was on guard.

He greeted them with two barrels, and they swerved over into a heavy patch of timothy on the upland, and settled down. We knew, however, that they would not stay there as long as there was rice in sight; in a very few minutes back they came. Wise and wary leaders

chose for them a strip of tall, fine rice on the edge of the field, and beyond our immediate protection. As they happened to be nearest Henry, he climbed out on the bank and walked round on the edge to rouse them.

When they rose, they did so reluctantly, and flying low across the field, alighted in the square that Henry had just left. It looked like the beginning of a game of seesaw that would be difficult for our side to play. But the overseer's strategy was equal to it. When, on his return to his stand, the birds flew back to the margin where we expected they would go, Henry drew his load of shot, and wadded in place of it a single flattened buckshot. This he fired above the feeding birds. The effect was instantaneous. The flat shot sang weirdly; I could hear it from where I was standing. The birds seemed far more afraid of the harmless bullet than they were of a charge of deadly shot. The whole flock rose tumultuously, and flew wildly away. Later, Henry told us that the leaden disk made a sound like the rush of air through the wings of a sharp-shinned hawk, one of the rice-birds' most dreaded enemies.

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The fight went on all day, and in spite of our efforts, the number of birds seemed to increase every hour. Beneath the blazing sun we stood in the hot water that gave off feverish odors of decaying vegetation. Until late in the afternoon we battled with the yellow hordes; then the invaders began to withdraw, some to the grassy uplands, and some to the patches of marsh that had not been submerged. Still others rose high in the air and headed in a southeasterly direction. We supposed that they were bound for the Cooper River plantations.

At sundown, when we came out of the field, the freshet had receded nearly a foot, and we knew that the next day the rice-birds would find other fields in which to forage. Tom and I were tired, but very happy and proud of our day's work. What we had done had required endurance and skill, although the results that we had accomplished were not to be measured by the actual work. We had helped to save the whole rice-crop.

The following day we took the rice-birds that we had killed to the village, and distrib-

uted them among our friends, some of whom, to return the favor, invited us to come the next day and "lean up against" their arbors of scup-
pernong grapes.

II

THE SPECTER OF TIGER CREEK

AFTER passing the winter on the plantation, we moved, in the spring, down to a house on the coast, where we spent the summer, safe from malaria and other swamp-fevers. It was there that we did our salt-water fishing, and there that we had this adventure with a huge shark in Tiger Creek.

One of the most popular forms of fishing along the Southern coast is the taking of mullets at night, either with a cast-net or with a gill-seine. They cannot be taken with a hook and line, and only rarely can they be caught in the daytime with a net.

One day in August my brother Tom and I, on our return home from a trip after school-bass along the marshes, ran into a big school of mullets near the mouth of Tiger Creek, a

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deep estuary that withdraws from the main channel and winds a sinuous way up into the marsh-fields. We could do nothing with the mullets then, but we reasoned that they might be there on the next flood, which would be about midnight, and we decided to try for them with the gill-seine.

At eleven o'clock we left the glimmering shell wharf and dropped silently down on the late ebb.

We had a ten-foot cypress *bateau*, light but steady, and capable of carrying a good load. Tom rowed, and I well remember that the starlight and the silent ranks of green cedars on the shore and the strange noises in the marshes made us feel very adventurous.

A pull of half an hour down the channel brought us to Tiger Creek, the surface of which glittered frostily in the starlight with the myriads of small fish that were playing on it. By this time the young flood was beginning to creep in; so, running the boat up under the lee shore, we waited there, and listened with pleasurable assurance to the telltale thudding of the water—a certain sign of mullets. As we had expected,

they were going into Tiger Creek; we had only to wait until they got well up the stream before stopping the mouth with the seine.

When it was evident that the school had passed us, we rowed quietly up the creek for a little distance. Then, while my brother pulled slowly, I staked one end of the seine and paid out the length over the stern. The creek was forty feet wide, and our net only thirty; so we staked the boat at the short end, which made an apparent, although not a perfect, shut-off.

As I was the younger, it usually fell to me to run the fish down, while Tom tended the net; but this time he asked me, much to my delight, if I would not like to take the fish out when they struck the net. Making me promise not to let the big ones get away, he splashed off through the marsh with an oar over his shoulder.

Having made the boat fast between the seine and the shore, I let myself down into the warm, sparkling water and began to feel my way out along the seine. I wanted to make sure that the corks were all floating right side up, and that the lead-line was set true. The water was

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not so deep as I thought it would be, for it came only a little above my waist by the boat and at the middle of the net; but the bottom was very soft and sticky, so that several times I had to take hold of the seine to pull my feet out of the mud. Consequently, I did not venture so far as the narrow channel that ran close to the shore at the other end of the net. There, I knew, the water was deeper. I found the net hanging right; and as it was a new one, with no holes and no weak places, I felt sure that we would make a large catch.

Before long I heard Tom begin to shout, and then came the sound of his oar spanking the water near the head of the creek. Soon I heard mullets jumping; then the water about me began to murmur, and a big fish struck the seine and gilled himself. The corks bobbed and the water foamed, while I waded toward the fish, took him out, and threw him into the boat. Before I could turn, several had gilled themselves, and one had jumped into our *bateau*. The hurrying fish, fleeing for open water, bumped against me. They rushed here and there, huddled against the seine, jumped over it, gilled

themselves, or buried themselves in the mud beneath it.

I was so busy and so eager to reach a certain fish that was making a great froth near the middle of the seine that I did not at first notice the decided lull in the general noise, and, anyway, my ears were pretty well engaged with Tom's shouting and his pounding with the oar. But I soon realized that something unusual in the water had frightened the mullets even more than our seine. Yet, well as I knew the salt creeks and the real dangers that lurk there, I did not move from the spot where, with my feet bogged in the sucking mud, I was feeling out along the seine and lifting it here and there to take out the fish that had gilled themselves.

I was holding the seine up with my right hand, and my left hand was hanging by my side in the water, when I suddenly felt a big wave rise to my shoulder, and in front of it, moving sluggishly past me along the downstream side of the seine, I saw the fin of a great shark. He had come in with the flood, and was prowling about for a kill.

Of all the creatures that infest salt waters,

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none are more sinister than the sharks, especially the hammerheads and the tigers. Moving like shadowy specters just beneath the surface, they appear suddenly, seize their prey, and rending it with their needle-like teeth, dart away to devour it. They are crafty in their movements, usually cowardly about noises, sinister in their silent and deadly approach.

The hammerheads never grow very large in those waters, but the gray, racing body of the tiger I had seen as long as twelve feet. The shark that was now so near me was—as I guessed from the height of his fin and the size of the wave it carried—ten feet long.

Just now he had turned away from the seine, and was making a semicircle in the creek. It is said that when a shark begins to circle on the surface, with his fin cutting the water faster and faster as he turns, it is time to look for trouble. That is exactly what I saw there on the surface of that placid creek, and I believed I knew what it meant. He had wind of me, and was circling to find and close in on me. There was something fascinating about his bloodhound tactics; sometimes he would stop as if listening,

or as if thinking the puzzle out in his crafty mind; then he would move deliberately off with insolent assurance.

At first I was merely surprised that such a big shark should be near Tiger Creek, and provoked that he should have spoiled our seining, for there was now no sight or sound of a fish anywhere. But when I saw the alertness of the creature, the terrible intensity in that rigid fin, that sweeping hither and thither of the lithe body, my feelings changed: I wanted to get out of his way as quickly as I could. There was nothing between us but open water, for I was on the outside of the seine.

Having stood so long in one place, my feet had gradually become set in the heavy mud, so that when I tried to move toward the boat I could not take a step. Hitherto, with the help of the seine, I had pulled myself along; but now, although I tugged vehemently, the only result was the giving of the stake on the farther shore. I could not budge an inch. I think the rapidly rising tide, now well up toward my shoulders, kept me from getting the proper leverage with my knees. At any rate,

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I was as fast to the bottom as if I had been tied.

Meanwhile, Tom, eager to get down to the seine, where he imagined I was having great sport, had ceased his shouting and beating. He was still a good way off, and I could hear him tramping along through the crackling marsh. I struggled with the dull trap that had locked its soft jaws on my feet, but I only made my knees ache with the strain, and apparently sank myself deeper into the water.

The shark had now come up to the end of the seine next to the boat. He stopped for a moment by it, evidently puzzled. But I felt certain that his next turn would be toward me. With that, losing my nerve, I shouted for Tom, and heard him answer me. He was having a tussle of his own trying to cross a boggy inlet that the incoming tide had filled; evidently, he thought I was calling him to hurry so as to help take the mullets out of the net.

When I heard him floundering in that mud-hole, I gave up the idea that he could help me out of my difficulty. Perhaps it was better so; for when I felt entirely thrown on my own re-

sources, when I knew that, single-handed, I must try conclusions with the huge creature that was hunting me, I knew that I must act, and act at once. Weapon of any kind I had none. I was alone and defenseless, in water almost up to my neck, and a ten-foot tiger-shark was within two boat-lengths of me, looking for me. For the first time since I had been fishing in those waters I was unnerved.

But my thinking was clear enough until I saw that big creature turn slowly away from the boat and come toward me through the dark water. Then I lost my head. I cried out wildly for Tom. I beat the water with my hands and screamed at the shark. But he came steadily on. His deliberation was more terrible than his swiftness would have been. I felt that he saw me standing there helpless. He was coming straight toward me now, with no sign of uncertainty in his movements. I saw his fin rise higher out of the water, as if he were summoning all his savage strength for the final rush, and I grew sick at his brutal assurance.

He was only ten feet away now. Whatever fate was in store for me would, I thought, be

immediate. Every chance of escape seemed cut off. Yet even in that dark moment an inspiration seized me. Catching the seine violently, I lifted it as high as I could, ducked through the water under it, rose on the other side and dropped the net into place. I had put a defense between me and my pursuer!

But how frail was that defense against the giant strength of the ruthless, cold-blooded creature! Yet for a moment it separated me from his terrible jaws. Now I felt slightly protected, but I could not move from my position, for my feet were still firmly embedded. The shark had already rushed by, and, baffled and perplexed, was circling swiftly. But now again he saw me, and came head on for the seine. I knew that it would not withstand his great weight and dreadful momentum. On he came, literally charging me. But before he struck the net he swerved, so that he did not break through, but turned swiftly along it.

My fascinated eyes followed him. He swam up to the end of the net next the boat. With the flow of the flood, the boat had swung on her moorings. It now lay up the creek, and

thus left a clear gap of ten feet, through which the shark, suddenly accelerating his speed, spurted fiercely. He was on me now; there was nothing between us. One wide circle in the creek would give him his bearings—then he would rush on his prey.

But with the coming of my enemy, my brother Tom also approached. I had forgotten him in my delirious fear. Now I shouted to him at the top of my voice, crying wildly, "Shark! Shark! Help me, or he'll get me!"

I saw him pause; then, catching my words, he broke into a full run. Leaping into the boat, he jerked the painter loose and shoved out rapidly.

Straight as a well-spiced arrow the great gray shark raced down upon me. I steeled myself for the sickening shock. But Tom's powerful hands gripped my arms, and he lifted me into the boat. There flashed by the stern the tall knife-fin of the tiger, and the huge creature tore his terrible way through the net as if it had been a cobweb.

III

A BLACK BUCK

WHILE our summers were nominally spent on the seacoast, hardly a week passed without our visiting the plantation; and our trips there became more frequent as the summer waned. During the time of our plantation boyhood, the deer season opened on the first of August; but this was no particular menace to the deer which abounded in the pineland. For the mosquitoes, flies, and snakes kept nearly every hunter out of the woods. Also, in August the hunter of the pine-lands is liable to be exposed to intense heat and to sudden and dangerous thunderstorms. But if a man be a hunter born, he will tolerate an astonishing number of inconveniences in order to gratify his sense of sport.

One of the most picturesque and memorable

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hunts that my brother Tom and I ever enjoyed occurred in mid-August; and since its incidents are so typical of that old plantation life which we once knew, I shall describe it.

For August hunting, a three o'clock start in the morning was necessary; for before the actual hunting began, we had a drive of nearly ten miles, and we must do our most active work before the heat of the day set in.

While on the plantation the day before this hunt, we had interviewed our ever-faithful companion in all our adventures, the negro boy Prince, and had told him to meet us at five o'clock next morning near the old Brick Church. We said we would bring the hounds with us from the village; so therefore it would not be necessary for us to go into the plantation until after the hunt.

It had been a still, cloudless August night, giving promise of a day like it. We drove out of the village at three o'clock, and I remember how fast asleep the houses seemed. The cotton-fields to our right were starred with their opening bolls; the cedars above the village lane were dreamy in their soft purple light. Before

us, out of which now breathed the ancient sweet odors of the coming dawn, the dark pine forest lay; while above it glittered, large and lustrous, the morning star.

Into the dim woods we drove, and to us came the ineffable sweetness of the wild blossoming forest. Our buggy made no sound in the sand; our wise and tolerant hounds trailed beside us, in the paths made by walkers, like shadows in the dusk of the pineland. As we were leaving the skirts of the village, we had persuaded a friend's dog to join us; it being the immemorial privilege of hunters in the Santee county to blow their horns when starting out, with the understanding that all dogs not tied when that sonorous summons came were at liberty to join the joyous departing cavalcade. Not wishing to wake the people, we did not blow until near the woods; and pretty soon a fine hound joined our two.

It was a little after four o'clock when we met Prince by the Brick Church. The day was breaking, and through the fragrant pinelands the bobwhites were beginning to call. We greeted the negro with that subdued hilarity

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that is the peculiar property of hunters who are on the hunting ground; while he, as eager as we, sat on his mule, chuckling and grinning.

"Prince, what's that thing you're riding?" Tom asked; not really for information, but because such a foolish question sometimes brought forth from Prince a witty answer.

"Dis is a mule, boss," was Prince's reply; "a good mule, too, sah, 'caze she only throwed me twice dis morning."

"Did she hurt you, Prince?" I questioned, knowing well enough that he was bantering us, but a little concerned over what might really happen if my brother or I should try his mount.

"No, sah, I was very lucky, 'caze both times I hit right on my head."

After a short consultation, we tied our horse by the Church, and turned the hounds over to Prince. It was then that we noticed for the first time that Prince had a dog following him; a mangy, skulking mongrel, lower even than "a cur of low degree."

"Look here, Prince," my brother said, just a little provoked, and yet a little amused at the incongruity of having a dog like that associating

with our somewhat well-bred, and certainly haughty, hounds: "Why did you let that 'critter' follow you?"

Prince appeared somewhat abashed.

"Just seems he was obliged to follow me, Mas' Tom. And dat dog is a fine trailer; yes, sah, a fine trailer."

"What can he trail, Prince?" I asked, "wood-mice?"

"He can trail a ham-bone, boss. But dat ain't no huntin' dog, sah. Dat's a society dog. Can't you notice he walks just like he had on his Sunday clothes?"

Leaving us laughing at his foolery, Prince whirled his mule and rode away under the pines, the hounds trailing knowingly after him.

We set out down the road to take our stands for the first drive. The sun had not yet risen; and the woods were cool and beautiful. As we walked together down the broad grassy drive, we loaded our guns, and spoke of the chances of jumping deer in the Briar Bed, the famous thicket toward the head of which the negro had taken the dogs.

On the stands of that drive we waited half

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an hour, without experiencing any more excitement than that occasioned by the persistent deer-flies with which the woods were at that season infested. Nor did our following drive of the Thickhead branch prove more successful. However, when Prince came out in the road, it was clear to us that he had seen something, for he was smiling the suppressed yet elaborately hidden smile of one who wishes to tell a secret.

"My dog done tree in yonder," he announced with pride, pointing back toward the dark outline of the Thickhead.

"What was it, Prince?" we asked in unison.

The negro gave us his infectious grin.

"He done tree a ground-mole," he said.

We then fell to discussing what drive we should try next.

"A big, able, black buck used to navigate in the Smallpox Corner. And he sure has got a brush-heap on his head." Prince was serious enough when he said this; so we decided to try that drive.

Since the stands were on the road ahead of us, and since this thicket with the sinister name

had often proved a favorite place for deer, we sent Prince ahead with the dogs, as he had to make a far circuit before putting them in.

Smallpox Corner is on Montgomery plantation; it is a dense thicket of bull pines, scrub oaks, myrtles, and gallberry bushes, with spaces here and there of tall broomsedge. It lies between the old road leading into Montgomery and the famous Montgomery Branch, a broad watercourse of the pine woods, supporting so wild a jungle growth that, at least where we were, near the lower end of it, deer seldom entered it. If there was anything in the Corner, it would probably come straight out to us.

But we did not have much hope that the dogs would jump deer. It was ten o'clock on a sultry August morning, and the cicadas were shrilling insistently. The sandy ridges in the woods were as dry as pepper; the savannas and branches were steaming. The birds were silent; even the great pines, so sensitive to the least breath, were without movement and without music. It truly did not look promising, but we were going to try it.

Hitching the horse in a clump of scrub pines

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beside the road, we walked slowly down to the stands. There were but two of them; Tom decided to take the one on the brow of the sandy hill, while I went to the one near Montgomery Branch, sixty yards away. Unless the deer doubled in the drive, he would surely run to one of the stands thus covered.

For a half hour we stood patiently by our chosen pines, while the day grew hotter, and the sultry stillness more intense. There was a little wood-spring near my brother's stand, and as I now looked up, I saw him drinking from it with a bay-leaf. I saw the glint of the cool water on the silver sides of the leaf; and I could not resist the inordinate thirst that that glance awakened, though I knew well enough that one of the cardinal rules in deer hunting is that a hunter should, under no conditions, leave his stand until the dogs have come up. Leaving my gun leaning against a pine, I walked up the slope toward the spring. After satisfying our thirst, we, being overcome with drowsiness on account of our early start from home that morning, lay down under a little bushy-headed live-oak, with our hats over our eyes, and talk-

ed in a sleepy way, wishing that Prince would hurry up and come out, so that we could get to the sheltered coolness of the big plantation house.

We may have gone half asleep under that oak; at any rate, we were particularly shut out from the world, until a sudden wild whoop from Prince startled us, and woke all the echoes of the dreaming woods. The next moment we heard the three hounds strike the trail. But high above their chiming chorus we heard the melodious voice of the negro driver, pleading, insistent:

“ ’Tis the ole buck! ’Tis the ole black buck! Don’t let him get by! O—O don’t let him get by!”

At Prince’s first shout we had bounded to our feet, and on that instant we saw the deer coming, he then being some three hundred yards away. At the speed he was going, he would cross the stands in five or six seconds. My brother, in his excitement and fearing that I would not get to the lower stand, for which the buck was heading, in time, dashed down the

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hill, leaving me at the upper crossing, with no gun.

Immediately beyond the road, there was a long burnt-over stretch of woods, and through this the buck was coming, his great speed unimpeded by brush or vines.

He was indeed a magnificent creature, with his tall symmetrical antlers in velvet; and he was the only buck I had ever seen which had black hair growing heavily on his chest. I understood why Prince had called him the old black buck. He came bounding along in his graceful, powerful way, every muscle of his shapely body subservient to his will. He was heading straight for my brother. I could see this so clearly that I was reconciled to not having my gun, and stood still by the spring, waiting for Tom to shoot.

Meanwhile the woods were ringing with the music of the following hounds, and Prince's voice sounded melodiously through the clamoring air:

" 'Tis the ole buck! 'Tis the ole black buck! Don't miss him! O—O don't miss him!"

On came the splendid creature, flashing over

the fallen timber and over the blackened spaces where the recent fire had eaten away bushes and young saplings. I saw my brother put up his gun. I held my breath in excitement. My intense pride in his excellent marksmanship was about to be fully justified.

Either winding him or seeing him, or doing both things at once, the great buck veered swiftly away from my brother and from within the deadly range of his gun. Then, literally crouching in his run, with the marvelous speed of which a cornered deer is capable, he skimmed off at a tangent, which brought him heading directly for me. Tom could have made the shot, I think, long as it was, for he had an old Westley-Richards muzzle-loader, an English gun of wonderful carrying power; but he was unselfish, and he did not want to spoil my chance. It is only once in a long while that a man gets a fair shot at such a deer as that one was. I saw Tom lower his gun and look up the hill toward me.

"My gun's down there!" I cried. "Shoot, shoot before he jumps the road!"

I gestured wildly for him to shoot, shouting,

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I now suspect, somewhat incoherently; but the dogs were already in the burnt ground, and Prince and his sonorous pleading voice were out of the thicket and under the open pines. Before my brother understood my predicament, the buck leaped the road, not fifteen feet from where I stood, and swiftly vanished into a dense copse of young yellow pines. A minute later I stopped the dogs. Then holding them in leash, I walked down the slope toward Tom. Each of us had, I am sure, less to regret than we had at first suspected.

"Man alive," said Tom in good-natured admiration, "wasn't he a beauty? He was really too pretty to shoot."

And since I could concur heartily in his opinion, our hunt, though unsuccessful, ended most happily.

IV

A LEVIATHAN

THERE was another adventure which we had which was similar to our experience with the black buck: this was with a bull alligator, and it happened in the springtime.

For years we had known that the biggest alligator in the whole Santee River delta made his home somewhere far back on Hampton Island. That was a desolate tract of delta land attached to the plantation. At one time it had been used for rice-planting, but had been abandoned for many years. It lies between the broad Santee and a deep, winding waterway known as Warsaw Creek.

Most of the tales of the alligator came to us from negro hunters who had seen him or had heard him roar, or had come upon his huge, bear-like tracks on the edge of the deep canal

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that ran across the island. Many a fat shoat, which had otherwise furnished some negro's winter supply of meat, had gone to glut this Minotaur. Far off on the mainland, up in the street where Henry and Prince and the rest of the colored people lived, little children would sometimes stop their play in the sand to listen to the challenge of the mighty bull, blared out from his haunts beyond the river.

Once or twice Tom and I had heard the big alligator roar, and the strange thrill with which we had listened made us eager to see him. But his haunts were almost inaccessible; during the winter, he hibernated; and during the spring and summer, when he was abroad, Hampton Island was dangerous, for it was infested with rattlesnakes, cottonmouth moccasins, and malarial mosquitoes.

One morning early in May, however, our wish to see the bull was gratified, chiefly through the ingenuity of Scipio, the negro hunter who lived down in the Bellewood section of the pine-land.

This negro was a strange character; although he was skilled in no trade, and lived a listless,

haphazard life, he was proficient in a dozen little ways of making a living. But he would not stick to any one of them. He was a superb woodsman; and to be that a man has not only to understand winds and weather, wild life and the secrets of nature, but he must have energy, sagacity, patience, and courage. Scipio was also a handy man with a canoe, an excellent trapper, a trainer of dogs, and a professional alligator-hunter. For minor accomplishments, he could pick the banjo, sing quaint melodies, tell strange stories of the woods and their inhabitants, and lead negro revival meetings.

Formerly he had lived on our plantation; but some years before, he had moved far back into the pineland, to gain his livelihood there as best he might. He paid us frequent visits, however, and on these occasions brought with him for sale such things as a wild turkey, a haunch of venison, a pair of antlers, or a cupful of alligator teeth. I remember that once he brought the skin of a white-nosed otter, one of the few that have ever been seen in that country.

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Tom and I were sitting under a big oak in front of the house, when Scipio came in sight down the avenue. He was carrying his musket and a huge buck's antler. We went down the driveway to meet him.

"I bring you a little token, sah," he said to Tom, who was his favorite. "I find dis in Moss Swamp."

"Killed any alligators this season, Scipio?" I asked.

The negro hunter laid his battered musket carefully down on the ground; then he said, in his low, drawling voice, "I's gwine after the grandpa alligator to-day, if the cunnel will let me navigate on the island."

"He'd like you to kill every 'gator on the place," said Tom, who felt reasonably sure that Scipio would "navigate" the island, whether he had permission or not.

"I can't go," Scipio said, "till the cunnel say, 'Go.' I ain't ready to die jest now," he added, with a grin.

As a matter of fact, the negroes rather liked to be berated by father, for not only did they enjoy pleasing sensations of self-pity, but they

knew that various gifts were sure to follow: clothes, tobacco, or any eatables from the pantry that could be smuggled out without the knowledge of the feminine members of the family.

"Where is the big 'gator?" I demanded of Scipio.

He swept aside the leaves between his feet, and on the hard white sand drew with his finger a rude sketch of the island.

"I saw his track on the Jack Field bank last week," he said,—“so,”—and Scipio spread his huge hand that did not look unlike the foot of an alligator. Then he smiled in his sly way, picked up his musket, and rose to his feet.

"I think father's down in the cotton-field. Let's go down and ask him about Scipio's going. Say, Scipio, why don't you take us along with you?" Tom's voice was pleading.

"Ain't you 'fraid of dat alligator?" asked the smiling Scipio. "He's afraid of me, caze I done killed his first cousin and his mother-in-law already."

"Oh, you'll take us along," I said, confidently.

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We went down under the great, quiet live-oaks, with their drapings of gray moss, past the strawberry patch and the sweet-potato banks, to the cotton-field, where the green rows stretched far toward the Mainfield and the pines. A mocking-bird was singing in a blossoming thicket of wild plum; the music interpreted the tender beauty of the day. Behind us the great house with its snowy pillars dreamed in the mellow sunlight.

By a clump of cherry-trees that bordered the big field ditch we found father, carefully examining a row of young cotton. He greeted Scipio with a certain affectionate joviality that few who have not lived long in the South can understand or imitate. We told him what Scipio wanted. Father must have known that something like it was coming, for he was not at all surprised at the request, and he did not appear particularly interested; he had reached an age when alligators have lost their glamour. The result of the interview was that Scipio got permission not only to kill the leviathan, but to exterminate the whole race of alligators on Hampton Island.

Then Tom asked father: "Would you mind, sir, if we went along with Scipio?"

Crossing the river in a dugout cypress canoe such as we should have to use was not without danger; moreover, the island was not a safe place. Father did not refuse his permission, but the fact that we wanted to go changed for him the aspect of the trip; at once he took an interest. He left his cotton, and led the way back to the house; as we went, he told us of the sport he had had, fifty years before, when he hooked a huge "'gator" in the lower Santee.

In the harness-room, a necessary adjunct to every plantation house, he rummaged in a box of odds and ends, and drew out a glittering steel spindle that some cotton-buyer had left with him as a souvenir. Then he produced a strong dog-chain, and a long cotton plow-line.

"There's no sport in shooting a 'gator," father said, as he spliced the rope to the chain. "To have any fun, you must hook him, give him a chance, and then see which is the better fighter. Here, Scipio, take this spindle down to Ben; tell him to make a hook out of it."

Scipio was soon back from the blacksmith's

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shop, with the spindle shaped for our use. Tom and I went down to the landing with him, and climbed into the big canoe. We all three paddled, and we made good speed; within half an hour we had passed through Mazyck Cut, gone up the river for some distance, and landed on the east bank of the island.

We made the canoe fast, pushed our way through a thick clump of hollies and tupelos, and were soon on the bank leading to the mouth of the canal—the haunt of the great alligator. Our plan was to approach the old marauder's home as warily as possible, and, if he was not in sight, to set the line for him. Scipio drew the load in his musket and reloaded with a small charge. With this he shot a water-turkey for bait. Before we had gone far on the bank the negro halted us, and pointed to a low, bushy-headed cypress, fifty yards away.

"Now, boss men," he whispered, "dar is where we will find him. But we must be mighty still."

With that he stooped low, and began to move noiselessly forward. Tom and I followed him; we strained our eyes for a sight, and our ears

for a sound, of the wily old creature that we were stalking. A Carolina rail, that flapped up from the marsh like a bunch of old rags, startled us. Once, when Scipio stopped, we heard a peculiar dry, scaly movement, and a big stumptailed cottonmouth moccasin slipped through the sedge into the water.

At last we came to the cypress, and Scipio peered through the network of roots that were interlaced above the bank. We could not see the part of the canal that he was looking at, and as he rose slowly from his crouching position, our hope that he saw the alligator grew less; we did not realize that it would be more fortunate for us not to see him just when we wanted to "set" for him. Finally Scipio stood upright, and we followed his example.

"Dat ole gentleman must be in his hole." There was a note of satisfaction in Scipio's voice.

We went forward and examined the muddy slope beyond the cypress. That must be the alligator's home. Near the cypress the canal was wide and deep. On both sides the ground was marshy, and there were growths of wam-

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pec and blue flags; the alligator had matted them down when he had come out to bask in the sun. His tracks were everywhere visible; we could see the places where he had dragged his body through the mud, and could distinguish the marks made by the scales of his tail. But there was no sign of the alligator himself, and we therefore proceeded to set the line. The free end we made fast to the cypress. Scipio cut a forked limb from the tree, and after trimming the branches, he plunged the butt into the mud on the edge of the canal, and pushed it down till the fork was about three feet above the water. Then he tossed the baited hook over the fork, and let it hang there.

We thought now that our work was done, and that we should go home, to return the next day. But Scipio made us trample down a place in the dry marsh behind the cypress; there we sat, while he squatted on a root of the tree. When either Tom or I started to speak, Scipio put his finger to his lip in warning.

After several minutes of silence, Scipio made a trumpet of his hands, and imitated the pleading, insistent bark of a mongrel dog. At first

it sounded far away; but gradually it approached, growing louder and more continuous as the trail appeared to grow hotter. This trail apparently led straight to the cypress; when the imaginary dog reached it, Scipio's voice changed. The tone indicated that the dog was no longer trailing his quarry, but had treed it. Once, when there was a pause, Scipio leaned over toward us, and whispered:

"Watch the canal."

Although we were well concealed behind the laced cypress roots, we had a good view of the long stretch of water. For some time nothing rewarded our gaze.

All the while, the imaginary mongrel was excitedly barking up the tree at the imaginary coon. Now if there is one thing more than another that will attract an alligator, it is the barking of a dog. And the alligator that we were after, although he was cunning and old, could not resist the temptation that Scipio held out to him.

As he was returning from a foraging expedition far down the marshy canal, he heard the call. We knew by the wave on the water, a

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hundred yards away, that he was coming, swimming eagerly toward us. Scipio turned his head and gave us a knowing grin. His voice grew softer now, and sank into the grieved whine of a dog that is tired of treeing. On came the alligator; his snout, his bulging eyes, and the top of his head were visible. From the width of the head between the eyes we guessed that he was fully fifteen feet long; the largest 'gator that we had hitherto seen had been fourteen feet long. Now the bull was only forty yards away, and apparently unconscious of our presence. Suddenly, to our dismay, he sank from sight. Without a sound or a ripple he disappeared.

Both Tom and I were much disappointed; but Scipio whispered, "Dat's all right." He knew that the 'gator was swimming under water, stealthily approaching his prey. Before we realized what was happening, a great scaly form leaped clear of the water, its jaws closed with a snap on the bait, and in an instant the rope was creaking against the tree. We had the old leviathan fast; his vicious struggles churned the muddy water of the canal.

Tom and I rushed out, intending to pull the huge creature ashore. But Scipio, who now came leisurely forward, asked us to wait.

The line, taut as a steel wire, was still; the alligator was sulking at the bottom of the canal. Scipio picked up a heavy stick that lay near, and struck the rope sharply. Instantly the line slackened, and up came the great alligator. As soon as he saw us, he lashed out furiously with his tail and plunged down again. The rope sawed the black mud; the water of the canal heaved and swelled.

"What'll we do, now that we've caught him, Scipio?" Tom asked.

The negro hunter turned to the tree, jerked the half-hitch loose, and motioned to us to take hold of the line with him. "Let's take him home for the cunnel to see," he said.

We hauled with all our might on the dead weight of the huge 'gator, and gradually he came out of the water; sullenly he emerged, with his broad scales glistening in the light. If the hook had been sunk deeper than the jaw, he would have followed us quietly; as it was, he fought every inch of the way up the slope

to the cypress; he wrapped his tail about one of the roots, and stubbornly resisted. Along the smooth bank he followed more tamely, sometimes crawling, and sometimes making us drag him.

Two or three times he rose on all fours and rushed awkwardly at us, with his huge, cruel mouth open and emitting a harsh, hissing sound. But his rushes were not dangerous, for his short legs would not long support his great weight; after each futile effort he would sink down with a prodigious grunt.

As we dragged the creature through the woods, we began to doubt the truth of father's opinion that fishing for alligators was sport. Brutal-looking as the monster was, I could not but feel a pang of pity for his helplessness and his dumb suffering. But I might have spared my sympathy; or, at any rate, I might have trusted father to know what he was talking about.

When we reached the boat, Tom and Scipio got in, and held their paddles ready to steady the craft if anything should happen. I held the alligator line, and was to get in last. The



"HE RUSHED AWKWARDLY AT US, WITH HIS HUGE CRUEL MOUTH OPEN AND EMITTING A HARSH, HISSING SOUND"—Page 29

others were to paddle slowly until our captive took the water, and then we would tow him home.

But we had not laid our plans well. At sight of the river, his ancient home, the alligator lost all his sullen listlessness, and began a rush that I could not stop. I yelled at him, picked up a rotten stick, and tried to beat him over the head with it; but I could not turn him. Tom and Scipio tried to get ashore to help me, but their very excitement delayed them.

Finally, just as the 'gator reached the bank, I took a quick turn of the rope round a young holly-tree. The tree bent when the rope became taut; then the line, with the shining spindle on the end, flew back. The leviathan was free! We heard a loud splash, saw one defiant flirt of a black tail. Then the rolling Santee closed over our victim and our conqueror.

Scipio was something of a philosopher. Things that he could not explain satisfactorily he declared were the work of supernatural agents. It was he who had believed that the whitehorn buck was a spirit. And now he stood gazing down the level stretch of the river

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and across to the billowy green woods beyond.

"Boss men," he said, in a meditative voice, "maybe dat was no alligator we had on dis here line. Maybe he was a Token."

When we told father that night, he laughed heartily; later I remember he said that most sportsmen were frank enough about the game that they brought home, but that they were inclined to be superstitious about the nature of the game that had escaped them.

V

OLD CUDJO'S MULE

SCIPIO, who had shown us the huge bull alligator, became for a time our chief hero among the negroes; but the following autumn he found a rival for our interest in Old Cudjo.

Great, indeed, was the excitement on the plantation when it was discovered that this old man had received a legacy; or, as he insisted on calling it, "a fortune." There is always a very natural interest attaching to a legacy, and this was much increased by the fact that Old Cudjo seemed the last person likely to receive one. He had long been one of our plantation charges. Without family or relatives, as long as I could remember he had lived alone in a small cabin that my father had had built for him at one end of the negro "street." To us he had al-

ways appeared too old to join in the regular work of the plantation; but he cut a little wood, raked leaves, mended fences, and was generally handy. Every Saturday, regardless of the amount of work that he had accomplished during the week, Old Cudjo was apportioned his week's rations. This way of his life continued for many years; indeed, until the magic word came that a distant relative living in Georgetown had died, leaving the old negro a legacy. The word, traveling by rumor's short-cut route, came before the letter from the attorney in Georgetown reached my father. The letter contained the official announcement of Cudjo's bequest, and likewise enclosed a cheque for the full amount of the legacy.

Well I remember how (while Old Cudjo, who had donned his best clothes in celebration of the event, and was waiting in the kitchen to receive his fortune) we were amused, disappointed, and concerned over the contents of that letter! The lawyer wrote bluntly that a negro had died, leaving a sum of money to his "Cousin Joe," and the lawyer had learned that Old Cudjo on our plantation was the legatee. He

was therefore enclosing his cheque for the full amount. And the cheque—the fortune—was \$14.35! We thought at first that we had a most delicate and difficult affair on our hands; for surely Old Cudjo would be sorely disappointed at the exceedingly modest size of the legacy. But father took a different view of the matter.

“Old Cudjo,” he said, “knows nothing of money. This will be a fortune to him. We need not show that we are disappointed; then he will be perfectly happy. All we have to do is to congratulate him and to advise him to spend it wisely.”

It was therefore in this spirit that we told the old negro of the amount of money which had been left him; and he was quite as overcome with gratitude as if the cheque had been one for four figures. There was no sign in his attitude which showed that he was anything but profoundly moved by joy and pride. And it was while Old Cudjo was in this thankful mood that my father broached to him the matter of the disposal of the money.

"Now, Cudjo," he asked, "how are you going to spend all that money?"

The old negro did not at once reply. He shifted his weight uneasily from one foot to the other, and in his eyes a strange light shone. He looked as if he feared that his announcement would be too ambitious to please us. At last he cleared his throat and spoke the word.

"I is gwine to buy a mule," he said with finality.

"A mule, Cudjo?" my father asked kindly, while the rest of us were trying to suppress our smiles; "why, Cudjo, I'll gladly lend you one of my mules for any work you want done. How could you make use of a mule?"

Cudjo mused for a moment. It was clear that his decision was made.

"I done love a mule so," he said at last, musingly and pathetically; "and I ain't never had one. And when I go to church," he added, "my mule would be my transportation."

We had been afraid of some determination of this sort; but we had hoped that it would not be so unreasonable as this. Old Cudjo had no land, he had no stable in which to keep a mule,

he had no feed or forage for it; if he wished to drive or ride it, he had no buggy, wagon, harness, saddle, or bridle. Besides, we were doubtful if he could buy any kind of live creature for the small amount of money with which he had been endowed. But though we seemed to have all the reason on our side, the ancient negro had determination and a strong natural desire on his; in short, our wishes and urgent advice to the contrary, Old Cudjo had his way. It was no later than the following day that several of the negroes told us that the legatee had taken his "fortune" and had gone to Charleston to buy a mule. The whole affair, though somewhat pitiful and ludicrous, well illustrated the weakness to which human nature is sometimes liable.

For a few days we almost forgot the incident of Old Cudjo's legacy. But we were reminded of it one morning when Prince came up with the news that Old Cudjo had returned from the city. "And he done bring dat mule," Prince added in a shamefaced way.

Tom and I had been making some bird-traps under a big live-oak in the backyard when

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Prince approached us with this diverting piece of news.

"What kind of a mule is it?" Tom demanded.

"A white mule," Prince said; "and he is sick. He walks like dis," he went on, taking a few high, wobbly, ridiculous steps.

"What is the mule doing now, Prince?" I asked.

"He is lying down. And maybe he wont get up no more!"

"Let's go over to see him," suggested Tom, seeing an opportunity not to be lost.

Prince and I only too readily assented, and together we set out for Old Cudjo's cabin.

Long before we reached it, we saw that many others on the plantation had been attracted by the same impulse which was leading us across the rice-field banks. About Old Cudjo's cabin there was a great crowd of negroes, large and small; and the crowd swayed and tiptoed as if it were viewing an accident. And indeed that which it saw was something resembling an accident. The crowd parted as we came up; and as the dusky faces turned toward us, we saw a marvelous assortment of expressions; but the

prevailing one was one of amusement. Evidently those who had envied Old Cudjo and his legacy were now beginning to feel that his good fortune had not, after all, created between them that gulf which is usually fixed between poverty and affluence. But for the smiles, we felt the atmosphere to be decidedly funereal; we felt as if we were being privileged to step forward "to view the remains."

In the open space before Old Cudjo's cabin sprawled the object of our quest. Emaciated, fatigued, lugubrious in countenance, it seemed fully prepared to fulfil Prince's prediction that it might never rise from the place into which it had now subsided. Near the head of the mule stood Old Cudjo, like a showman proudly exhibiting the chief spectacle of his menagerie.

"Where'd you buy him, Cudjo?" I asked. I meant to be kind, but this was an unfortunate question. The negroes all about me began to grin and chuckle. There were many answers murmured, some of which I caught: "Somebody done pay him for haul it away;" "He done find him in the graveyard;" "Dat is the mule Baalam done ride a thousand years ago."

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Cudjo, not in the least conscious of his mule's evident shortcomings, told us that he had not been all the way to the city, but that, making his want known along the road, he had found a man who was willing to part with a mule. The man, he said, was a very kind gentleman to let him have the mule for \$14.35. We thought the gentleman to be a shrewd bargainer, to say the least.

By this time the negroes had begun to disperse; and as we were eager to tell the people at home of Old Cudjo's purchase, we started back for the house, as we left advising Old Cudjo to come up to the plantation stable to get a good feed for the mule.

When we told father of how the negro had spent his money, he was plainly distressed. He did not see the amusing side of the situation as we did; at least it did not impress him so strongly as the pathetic one. I think he felt that he should have taken the whole matter into his own hands, and should have insisted that Old Cudjo spend the money judiciously. Indeed, this persuasion grew upon him to such a degree that that night, while Tom and I were

still laughing over the desolate appearance of the mule and the sly remarks of the negroes, father told us that he was going to make Old Cudjo take the animal back, and that he himself would go with the negro to help him recover the money.

"What if Old Cudjo objects?" Tom asked.

"I can make it clear to him," father replied, "that he has been swindled."

"What if the mule refuses to get up?" I put in. "He may have to be taken back in a wagon."

"He will get up when he sees something to eat just out of his reach," father assured us.

Our bedroom was on the first floor; but the plantation house having a high cellar on a level with the ground, our windows were some ten feet up. Ours was a corner room, with four large windows, and we always felt that we were especially easy of access from the outside. On account of this, we had an understanding with the negroes on the place that if any of them needed us in the night, or brought a message of some kind, he should come to one of our windows and rap with a long stick. Then, if neces-

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sary, we could awaken the others in the house. As the years had passed, we had grown accustomed thus to be frequently awakened. Sometimes a negro would come for some medicine for a sick child (and then we always awakened mother) ; sometimes a message would be brought from a distant plantation; often Prince would come, just to tell us to be ready for some exciting adventure the next day. On this particular evening, therefore, we were not at all surprised to be awakened by a rapping at the wooden shutters of our eastern window. Tom and I thought we had just gone to sleep; but as we came to the window we saw that the sky was rosy through the dark glossy foliage of the live-oaks and through the pendant banners of moss that they bore. Beneath the window we perceived in the dimness the customary dusky figure.

"Is that you, Prince?" Tom called.

"No, sah," came the answer in a sad voice, "this is Old Cudjo."

"What's the matter, Cudjo?"

"My mule,—my mule is done died!"

"Dead, Cudjo?" I asked. "Are you sure?"

"That fool mule," he answered, with a wholesome note of resentment in his tone, "done kill heself."

Then he told us that, after we had left his cabin, the mule had gotten up, had grazed in a near by grassfield, and had apparently been all right. He went on to say that at dusk he decided to tie up his "creeter" for the night. He had therefore led the mule near the cabin and had tied him to a small persimmon tree that stood in the yard.

"'Bout an hour ago," Old Cudjo ended, "I heard a pitching and a jumping and a wrastling; and when I got out the door to that fool mule, he done been hang heself."

"Oh," said my brother slowly, a sudden thought dawning in upon him; "so the mule hanged himself, did he, Cudjo?"

"Yes, sah, dat's what he done do."

"How did you tie him? What kind of a knot did you use?"

"I done tie him very careful, sah; I tie him with a good slipknot round his neck; but he done hang heself."

My brother and I withdrew from the win-

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dow for a moment to get control of ourselves out of sight of Old Cudjo. In fact, I never did go back to the window. I lay on the bed and laughed in the most shameless fashion. Tom talked for awhile with the old negro, gave him some comfort in the shape of a piece of tobacco, and assured him that we should be over to his cabin to see him in a short while. When we did go, a half-hour later, we found that the old negro's story was perfectly true, even to the disastrous detail of the "good slipknot."

Thus perished the "fortune" of Old Cudjo. But the ancient negro bore his loss like a philosopher; and his strong resentment against his mule for hanging himself relieved the situation from any very tragic element. Moreover, his grief was assuaged in other ways. One day we overheard him say to father: "I done had a mule once in my life, and that is something to be thankful for. And if that mule had lived, he might have made me proud, sah; and you know I ain't nobody to be proud."

VI

BIG ABEL

NOT long after the sad matter of Old Cudjo's mule, Tom and Prince and I, who had had our fun over that mule, discovered that we were not such good judges of animals as we had supposed ourselves to be.

On the plantation we had a fine yoke of oxen named Cain and Abel; but by some perversity of nature, it was not Cain but Abel that was the wicked one. Bulls are usually considered dangerous animals; a cow with a young calf is likely to be fractious—as she should be; but the ox has become a symbol of harmlessness, deliberation, and pastoral peace. Yet when an ox does acquire truculent traits, he is one of the hardest brutes in the animal kingdom to manage. He has the stubborn spirit of a mule, the uncertainty of a colt, and the cunning of a swamp pony.

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Big Abel was a handsome creature, with a frosty gray coat, a fine neck, a lean but powerful body, and the widest and longest horns I ever saw; some of his ancestors probably lived in Texas. This ox had a sinister reputation among the negroes, and consequently we looked upon him with distrust and just a little superstitious dread. When we mentioned this distrust to Prince, the negro boy would laugh in his quaint manner, and say that Abel just looked ugly, and could not help the way he looked. But we doubted Prince's judgment; all the cattle feared Abel; only recently he had rushed a young steer against the straw-rick, and had gored him cruelly.

Plantation fields are wide, and plantation fences are far apart. Along the banks of the ditches there are heavy thickets where an ox could browse unnoticed until you came face to face with him. And it was one of our fears that some day Big Abel would catch us off our guard or corner us; we could guess what would happen then. On a small farm there would probably be persons within call, but the chance of such a thing on the plantation was remote.

Some of the negroes would be far out in the pine woods, dipping turpentine or splitting rails; others would be down in the rice-fields, or across on the island. We had to learn independence from those great spaces and those generous distances; from the vast forests of pine on the one side, and the broad river and huge tracts of delta land on the other.

Late one afternoon in February Tom and I were down at the stable-lot, which at that time of day was the liveliest place on the plantation. The horses were being fed, the cows were being milked, and the hogs were fighting and squealing over their share of rice-flour and chopped sweet potatoes. Even the half-wild hogs that we had caught in the woods, and that ordinarily were silent in their pens, were now bold enough to grunt with the other hogs.

Father usually let all the stray cattle from the woods come into the enclosure and spend the cold winter nights beside the big rick of rice-straw. The poor creatures were glad to come; during the greater part of the year the woods are lush and green, but in midwinter they yield almost no food. Among the hungry,

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furtive newcomers, Big Abel was the ruler. One evening a large, unmarked bull came in from the woods and disputed his title; but after a pitched battle, the stranger was willing to withdraw, and accepted with cringing deference the permission of his conqueror to eat a little straw out at the windy end of the rick.

On this particular afternoon, Tom and I had determined to test the big ox's temper, but we were uncertain how to proceed. We had been talking about it for several minutes when we heard Prince, who was in the stable loft racking down the horses, talking to his father, who was milking the butt-head cow in one of the spare stalls below.

"Dat Big Abel is a mean ox," Will said, from beside the cow. "Dem wide horns signify dat he jest expatiate and prevaricate all over the country."

Prince chuckled. "I don't 'fraid him," he said. "Abel and Prince been friends ever since hatchet was a hammer."

"Some of these days he's gwine hammer you," was Will's answer.

When Prince came down from the loft, we

called him out. He had been a boon companion in all our escapades and adventures, and was usually ready for anything that we might suggest. But our plan surprised him.

"Prince, we're going to tackle Big Abel tonight," said Tom.

"Tackle him?" Prince asked.

"We want to find out whether he's bad or not," I explained. "We know you aren't afraid of him, and we want to see whether he's afraid of you. What do you think?"

"Abel is all right," Prince replied, with his inevitable grin, "but Abel's horns are mighty long."

"We thought you might get a rope round his horns for us, Prince," Tom suggested, "and then we could—we could—well, tie him up close to the fence and curry him, or put a bridle on him and ride him."

At this last suggestion Prince guffawed.

"Ride Abel?" he exclaimed. "I wouldn't ride dat oxen if I neber ride again!"

That was a decisive answer from one who knew more about Abel than any one else; but

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in those days we seldom took anything as decisive.

"Can you get a rope over his horns, Prince?" I persisted.

The negro assented; he went into a small shed near by, and brought out a plow-line with a slip-knot in the end. We climbed the fence, and crossed the little "hog-crawl" that separated the stable-lot proper from the large enclosure where the big rick and all the cattle were. Some of the wilder ones ran out of the gate when they saw us coming; others stopped their feeding, and eyed us with distrust.

But Big Abel did not deign to give us a glance. His indifference, the size of his great body, and the wide sweep of his scythe-like horns impressed us as much as open hostility would have done. Tom and I stopped at the bars, but Prince, carrying the rope, slipped quietly into the lot, passed the other cattle, and walked straight up to Big Abel.

He ran his hand caressingly over the huge ox's side, stroked the bowed neck, set the noose deftly over the horns, drew it taut, and pulled Abel's great bulk toward him as if he had a

grievance against the ox. These tactics won the favor of the old monarch, who followed Prince with a mingled air of stateliness and meekness.

Tom and I were somewhat jealous of Prince's courage, and ashamed of our own timidity. But we need not have been ashamed; for Big Abel regarded Prince with more favor than he did other persons. Prince led Abel up to the bars; then, crawling through, he handed me the rope. Big Abel raised his great head, with its magnificent horns, and looked gloomily at us.

"Shall we ride him, Tom?" My voice, I know, hinted that we should not.

"Prince, suppose you try him first," my brother suggested.

Prince dissented. He and Abel were good friends, he said, but not even he had ever taken the liberty of riding him.

"Abel's mighty particular," he finally said.

Meanwhile the huge ox stood beyond the bars, silent and motionless. He was not so much as chewing his cud.

"Pshaw!" my brother exclaimed, suddenly.

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"I'm not going to let that old fraud back me down."

With that, he put one foot through the fence and stooped down to get between the bars. But he did not get far, for I cried out to him, and Prince caught his coat and pulled him back. Abel had made a lunge at him, and one of the sharp horns had rasped against the rail. The ox raised his head, shook it, and gazed defiantly at us. He blew out his breath angrily. His feet were set apart; he was braced for anything that we might bring against him.

We were afraid of Big Abel.

Meanwhile the plantation negroes, returning home through the twilight, gathered to see what was going on. We felt ourselves in the position of showmen who, having collected a crowd, feel bound to produce some entertainment. Old Isaac, a plantation sage, edged near the bars, and peered through at the ox.

"This Abel," he said, apparently to himself, but chiefly for our benefit, "takes his name from the Bible, but his meanness from the debil. What you gwine to do to him, Mas' Tom?"

"We don't know exactly," Tom answered.

Isaac grunted his understanding of the situation. "Prince," he said, "you better turn dat oxen loose."

But with a shake of his head, Prince disclaimed all responsibility.

At last, in sheer desperation, I proposed a foolhardy plan, for lack of a better way to satisfy the curious interest of the negroes who now stood ranged along the fence.

"I'm going to try to beat old Abel to the straw-rick," I said. "Prince, you hold him here against the bars till I get through the fence. I just want to get through clear, that's all. Then turn him loose, and I'll show you a race."

"Take care, boss," old Isaac cautioned. "Abel might show *you* a race."

There was a general murmur of dissent among the negroes, who, much as they loved excitement, did not wish to see me take the risk of being gored. But I had made up my mind. I crawled through the fence, and was about to call to Prince to let Abel free, when the ox broke away from the bars and wheeled on me. So quick was he that he came near stabbing me with the first sweep of his horns. I did not

know that an animal of his size could be so quick. I had no chance to get back through the fence. I had a fleeting glimpse of the scared faces of the negroes and of the faithful Prince struggling to get through the fence in time to catch the rope as I fled madly for my only place of safety, the straw-rick, thirty yards away.

Fortunately, I saw just where I wished to go. Near the end of the rick was a stout hickory stave about which the straw was thin. Somehow I reached it ahead of Abel. I grasped it, and drew myself up to safety just in time to avoid the sharp horns. For a few moments I lay panting on the straw. Then I crawled up to the tie-piece of the rick and looked down on my tormentor, and over at Tom and Prince and the men, who had been thoroughly alarmed by my danger.

"Can you come and get him now, Prince?" I called.

It was getting too dark to see very much, but I saw the gleam of Prince's teeth.

"Abel's bex [vexed], but I'll try," the boy said.



"JUST BEFORE PRINCE TOOK THE FENCE. THE OX OVERTOOK HIM" — *Page 87*

As he climbed through the fence, the other negroes poked fun at him.

"Lemme hold your hat, Prince," one of them said.

"Stop up Abel's ears with straw, so he can't hear you coming!" another shouted.

And a third cried, "Prince, I will tell your pa that I was the last one to see you!"

But Prince was not daunted; he walked straight across the lot toward Abel. I admired his spirit, but doubted his wisdom.

Suddenly Big Abel heard the step behind him, whirled, and with head down, plunged for the negro boy. He took Prince by surprise. The boy hesitated, called out a protest, then a threat, to the ox; and not until the animal was almost upon him did he turn and run.

But he did not have a fair start. Big Abel gained on him, and just before Prince reached the fence, the ox overtook him. I saw the burly head go lower; then there was a swift and sickening sweep upward, and Prince was sent flying over the top rail of the fence. I gulped hard when I saw it, for I was to blame for what had happened. To my relief, however, I saw Prince

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get up, apparently unhurt. Once more his teeth gleamed.

When the negro wags saw that he was none the worse for his adventure, they began to chaff him again.

"What was your hurry, Prince?" asked one.

"I neber knew you could jump like that before," came from another.

A third said, "Prince, there's Abel looking for you."

The ox had been glaring sullenly at Prince; but now he turned his attention to me again, and lunging back morosely across the lot, took up his watch under the rick.

My position was a ridiculous one. It was long after sunset, and the people at the house would soon be wondering where Tom and I were. And here I was, besieged in a straw-rick by a truculent old ox. I was humiliated, and yet I dared not come down. The rick was in the middle of the lot, and I could not move in any direction without attracting the notice of Abel.

The negroes began to drift away toward their homes; after a time only Prince and Isaac

remained with Tom; and since the negro boy had been disillusioned as to his relations with the big ox, there was no one to help me.

As I was pondering what I should do, I saw father coming down the path under the great oaks. He was carrying a basket that, as I afterward learned, contained a few choice ears of flint-corn that he had picked for seed, and that he was going to send over to the foreman, Henry Snyder, by Prince. Tom went forward to meet father, and explained the situation to him. I could not see the expression on father's face, but I heard his laugh ring out. Then he came up to the bars and held out an ear of corn.

"Come, Abel!" he called, in the softest, most persuasive voice. "Come, Abel!"

To our surprise, the big ox obeyed; he slowly crossed the lot and took the tempting ear. While Abel was rolling it in his mouth, father took the dangling rope in his hand, and made a hitch round one of the cedar posts. Then he called to me to come down.

He did not scold me when the fence was once more between me and Abel. He merely

said, "You boys ought not to tease an animal. An animal has no sense of humor. Big Abel is all right, but he's touchy. Don't bother him again, or he may get vicious."

Before we went up to the house, each of us fed the pacified ox an ear of father's seed-corn; ever after that we treated Abel with respect, and he never molested us again.

VII

RED LIGHTNING'S RACE

IT might be supposed that our experience with Big Abel would have made us careful of our conduct toward all creatures; but that its effect was not what it should have been, this story will show.

All that boys do on a Southern plantation is not by any means blameless; there is nothing vicious, but there is a great deal that is at least mischievous. Such was our adventure with the lordly Red Lightning, father's prize game cock, and the common rooster that lived in the negro "Street," which, by his pride and bigotry, had incurred hatred. For a long time this rooster had not been considered the property of any one in particular; and probably in self-defense he considered every one's property his own. He roamed at will through the foreman's

stock-yard, over Prince's peanut vines, and about old Isaac's newly-planted millet patch. He was a surly, common-looking fellow, with a loud voice and coarse manners. Without a doubt his lineage was obscure. My brother had held a personal grudge against him ever since the day the rooster had spied him crawling after a flock of crows, and had set up such a racket that he had made him lose his shot. On one occasion he had scratched up a whole planting of sieva beans for the negro boy Prince; so he too had a just grievance.

One week early in November, father went to Charleston on business; and Tom and I felt, as was our custom, a great deal of important responsibility; for in a general way, when father was absent, we looked after the work of the plantation. We oversaw the feeding of the stock, the laying in of the daily supply of firewood, the distribution to the negroes of groceries from the commissary, and superintended any special work that happened to be in progress at that time. Among smaller cares was feeding the chickens and turkeys, which really required little attention because there was

so much waste rice and corn by the barnyard and feedhouse. It was out at the barnyard that we conceived the idea of lowering the common rooster's pride; for it was there that Red Lightning lorded it over the weaker spirits of the fowlyard.

"Why don't we take Red over and make him trim that old brute of a rooster in the 'Street'?" Tom suggested.

"I don't hate him enough to see him killed," I answered; "besides, we might have to pay damages."

Tom was willing to agree that it might prove rather a hazardous undertaking; but since we were so certain that Red Lightning would administer a sound and speedy thrashing to the impudent tyrant, we considered that the probable result of the adventure would be worth the risk involved.

"You can be Red's second, and Prince will hold the sponge for the other gentleman; I am going to watch you two so that the fight will be a fair one. We really ought to give that low-bred fellow a handicap; I know he'll faint just as soon as he sees Red's spurs."

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Such was my brother's opinion of the coming contest.

We had had Red Lightning for three years. He was the most beautiful game cock in our whole section of country. As a young bird, father had brought him from western North Carolina, where the renowned strain of Fletcher games had originated. There was no doubt about this rooster's beauty. His spade-shaped body was perfectly arrayed in dark-red and black feathers. His legs were like those of a racehorse, their very shape and symmetry showing their adaption to special uses. His tail feathers were a triumph of color and arrangement; and his bearing was in keeping with the regal splendor of his appearance. He was nobly, savagely, haughty; and he was forever keeping the fowlyard in a state of cringing deference that bordered on sycophancy. Proportionately, he impressed his beholders also.

As boys, we had always been proud of our heritage; but we could never quite assume the superiority of the Fletcher strain of games as it was manifested in Red Lightning.

We now decided to use him as our champion in the coming tournament.

We disclosed our purpose to the negro boy Prince, our ever-faithful companion in all our adventures. He appeared a little dubious at first, declaring that his father would disown him if he let Red Lightning kill the old rooster in the "Street." But Tom and I pointed out that there would be no real fight; that at the first glimpse of our champion's fierce mien, not to mention his lordly tail feathers and his fearful spurs, the surly old duffer that had so long strutted insolently about would at once abandon his pretensions. Our purpose was not to injure but to humiliate the pride of the common rooster.

"It will be no fight, Prince," my brother assured the negro. "It will merely be a race. You will be the second for our enemy; and we are willing to give your sprinter ten yards' handicap."

The thing began to appear as alluring to Prince as to us, and he forthwith consented to arrange for a meeting. Straightway we lured Red Lightning over to our feet, and I picked

him up, somewhat to his disdainful surprise, but not at all to his fear or mistrust. Sending Prince ahead to locate the other rooster, we made our way across an old abandoned bank near the river, and so through the cornfield toward a row of negro cabins, standing out clearly against the dark background of the pine forest. These cabins, by the way, were not such as are now seen by the tourists through the South; they were old slave houses, roomy and well-built. The lumber was heart yellow pine and swamp cypress, with a cypress shingle facing over the weather-boards, and with generous brick chimneys. And each was set in its acre of ground.

Before we came to the cabins we saw Prince running back to meet us, and from the gleam of his teeth we knew that he had located our victim.

"Where is he, Prince?" we asked in a breath.

The negro boy pointed down to the edge of the Mainfield, where the gleaming white feathers of a leghorn hen showed us where our enemy must be. We were glad that he was there; for it was in a secluded hollow, almost

surrounded by bushy-headed cypresses. We were doing a mean thing, and we felt mean about it.

Red Lightning, who had borne the journey thus far without complaint, objected somewhat to being taken through a dense thicket of wild-plum bushes and tall blackberry canes. But Tom and I thought he would be grateful to us when he set eyes on the object of our coming.

As we came close to the old rooster, innocently scratching for his hens; as we marked the vigor of his search and his generosity to his followers; but more especially when we noticed the haphazard shape of his body, his gawky legs, and the dismal patches of feathers here and there with worn places between—when we saw these things we boys felt honestly ashamed of ourselves.

"I somehow wish he looked a bit more like a sport or a fighter," Tom confessed. And he expressed my feelings also.

The negro Prince said nothing; but he looked with fading hope at his champion who now, having apprehended our presence, had ceased the exciting pursuit of crickets and grasshop-

pers and was eyeing his enemies with dignified apprehension. He was on his own ranging-ground, but he was a long way from the shelter of houses and barns; so at any moment the expected race might begin. Red Lightning suddenly startled all of us (especially those with guilty consciences) by crowing violently, evidently eager to get at the hateful rival who had now come to his haughty vision.

Cautiously we approached the common rooster, holding our game cock in front of us, ready to toss him forward the moment his antagonist turned tail. The distance was now only six feet, and we thought that near enough. We dropped our game, and he alighted on rigid legs, and immediately bent himself backward for a mighty crow.

But not more than the first note had sounded from that proud and splendid throat when a strange and amazing thing happened. Prince's champion crossed in a trice the short space which separated the two roosters, and struck Red Lightning with the full fury of his strength and anger. The game sprawled on his back in some muddy sand, and rose disheveled, uncer-

tain, just a little fearful of the catapult that had so fiercely launched itself upon him. Yet he struck a truculent attitude, ruffled his neck-feathers forward, and picked savagely at imaginary food, all the while his keen red eyes glinting a light so swift and menacing that the boys felt sure that one blow from him would end the matter. Slowly they drew together; there was a sudden rush, Red Lightning springing into the air to drive his spurs into his opponent's head. But the old rooster ducked quickly, whirled, and before the champion could fully recover himself, had dealt him a terrific blow—striking with his spurs and buffeting with his wings and body. Red Lightning went spinning backward, bounded up, lowered his head, and looked about with nervous uncertainty; then he turned and fled shamelessly, the scorned and piebald rooster in hot pursuit. The game streaked in through the thicket toward the rice-field, and the old rooster followed, relentless, revengeful. When a game turns coward, he is a veritable poltroon. But who would have thought it of Red Lightning!

Prince it was who broke our astonished silence.

"Yonder's the race!" he exclaimed. "Red can outrun a fox! Yonder's the race!" He clapped his hands on his knees and bent over with laughter.

Tom and I were so discountenanced that for a moment we did not move or speak. We could only look at each other with amused mortification. Our tower of pride, our matchless champion, our famous Fletcher game had shown a yellow feather. All other results save this we might have foreseen. We knew well enough that a common rooster would seldom fight away from his own ground; but one of the sporting characteristics of a game is that he will fight strangers in any place or time. But evidently there could be circumstances in which this rule would not hold; and such circumstances were now at hand.

Meanwhile the pursued and his pursuer had vanished; and now, from far away in a waste field, we heard the distressed cries of a rooster that is taking a good whipping. As we hurried forward, we had a fleeting hope that the game

had made a stand, and that the noise we heard was coming from his former tormentor. But such a hope was vain. In fact, we found Red Lightning in even a worse plight than we had feared.

Through the broomsedge field, blindly trickling down a muddy ditch, a small stream that had its source in a trash-choked spring near the negro cabins, made its way in oily stealth and silence. Down in this ditch we found the two roosters, Red Lightning with the front half of his body jammed under the dripping bank. His enemy stood on a little sandhill behind him, giving him blow after blow. Beautiful red and black feathers lay all about the scene of the chastisement, and soft buff ones drifted slowly with the current toward the rice-field.

My brother appeared to appreciate his champion's desperate plight before I did; for he sprang down through the briars into the ditch, landing with a splash in the mud and water. He made an angry pass at the common rooster, which avoided the blow, and, beating his wings, crowed loudly in triumph. Turning his attention to poor Red Lightning Tom drew him forth

from his futile hiding place. He was terribly frightened, and rather bruised and bedraggled. Holding him under his arm, Tom struggled up the bank, where the three of us excitedly examined the extent of his injuries. Most of his tail feathers were gone; his back was marked with the cuts of blunt spurs; whole bundles of feathers had been torn out by the savage enemy; many feathers were broken and soaked in mud; moreover, Red Lightning had completely lost his inimitable air of courage, breeding, and distinction.

"He'll never look the same again," was my melancholy comment, to which my brother acquiesced a sober agreement.

"And yo' Pa loved that rooster so!" ejaculated Prince, touching us where we were tender; for we had never expected that father should know of this escapade, and now he would certainly learn of it. The discovery of our mischief was now assured. What would father say, we wondered, to our taking Red Lightning away from the yard in so clandestine and unsportsmanlike a manner? Would he ever be willing to go to the city again, trusting us to do

the right thing on the plantation until his return? Then we were haunted by vague fears that we could not well express in words because we could not frame them in thoughts; but we knew that they touched on honor, conscience, and trustworthiness.

Such, then, was our distress of mind as we made our way homeward; and such it continued to be when, many hours later, father was telling us of his trip and of the incidents of his journey to the city. Never before had he seemed to us so much of a man, so frank, so openhearted; and never before had we seemed to ourselves so mean, so underhanded, and so unworthy of being trusted.

Finally Tom and I could bear the burden no longer; so, after a whispered consultation in the hall, we came in to father and made a clean breast of it, telling him everything.

At last, with the ruddy firelight playing on the kindly face that we loved so well, father looked up at us with a smile that hurt with its gentleness.

"The game," he said, "will be all right after a week or so, and will be as pretty as ever after

the first moulting. I am not worried about him or what happened to him. But you boys must not fight chickens again. There are too many clean sports, especially here on the plantation, for you to bullyrag a pair of roosters. Besides," he added, "I could have told you that Lightning wouldn't fight. Fred Fletcher had a strain of what he called 'tame' games, and I got him to pick me one. Red has the game look and carriage, but he is no fighter. I am glad of it. Fighting is never a sport."

VIII

THE DAISYBANK TABLE

IT was sometime after our disgraceful behavior in the affair of Red Lightning before father would fall in very readily with any of the adventurous schemes that we proposed carrying through. And we had an especially difficult time persuading him to let us venture after the famous Daisybank Table. But our vital need of it finally overcame his scruples.

To be unable to give a wedding present to a person for whom we cared a great deal was painfully humiliating; yet it was the fall after the fatal storm of 1893, when every head of rice had been blackened and ruined by the salt tide that had submerged all the fields in the Santee country. Every one was "hard up." And it was at such a time that our nearest neighbor and one of our dearest friends had planned

to be married. What in the world should we give her as a present? Her people, like ours, were plantation owners; so no gift characteristic of our picturesque life, such as a set of antlers or a barrel of plantation sweet potatoes, would serve. Moreover, there were no secrets between us; her mother knew all about our silver and china—having borrowed them on several state occasions; so there was no chance of our offering as a gift what had already become familiar as a loan.

After several family consultations, in which heirlooms were examined and rejected, our father at last suggested that we give as a wedding present the famous Daisybank table—if we could find it.

That table had a very romantic history. It was a beautiful piece of rosewood, and had been presented, about the year 1820, to Maj. Sydenham Desmond of Daisybank Place, in the Santee country, by the captain of a Spanish bark. It was a token of appreciation of the old major's kindness in having the captain nursed through an attack of yellow fever contracted in the coastwise trade. Later, the table was

brought to our plantation and given to my grandmother by the major's son, who, according to tradition, might have been my grandfather, had he not fallen at the Battle of Antietam.

During the Civil War, the plantation was deserted, except for the negroes. There was no fighting nearer than Charleston—forty-two miles away through the pineland; but wild rumors of advancing armies, of scouting foragers, and of pillaging marauders penetrated even to the pastoral retreats of the rice plantations. The negroes stayed in their cabins, and looked after the crops as best they could without efficient supervision.

On several occasions, when rumors that the enemy were coming grew insistent, a few of the older and more trustworthy of the slaves went to the "great house," and bore from it into the woods the best pieces of furniture. The story is still told at home that old Peter McCoy, a veritable giant of a negro, picked up, unaided, the massive mahogany sideboard, and carried it into the thickets by Spencer's Pond, half a mile away. Among the articles thus concealed

was the famous and beautiful Daisybank table. Every piece except that had been recovered. We were given to understand that the table had been found in the woods by "a runaway negro" (a criminal fugitive), who had taken it far up the river to Bear Wallow.

In the years after the war, no Southerner had time to trace lost heirlooms. Every man was trying to right the wreck of his fortunes, and to make some kind of living. Consequently, for a long time, nothing was done toward recovering the Daisybank table.

About 1880, my father went up the river to Bear Wallow, the strange negro settlement about fifteen miles from home, for the express purpose of regaining his property. But evidently the man who had the table had got wind of his coming; although my father was met most respectfully, the answers given him were evasive, and he failed of his purpose. Yet he had noted a constrained attitude in the negroes, and was convinced that one of them had the table. But he never found time and opportunity to go up the run again and try to find it.

All of us knew the history of the table; and

on several occasions my brother and I had pleaded in vain for permission to go in search of it. I think the reason for the refusal was that there lived at Bear Wallow a negro named West McConnor, who was a thorough desperado. He was a hunter and woodsman famous over three counties—a wild and ranging spirit, who was suspected of all kinds of lawlessness, and at whose door could be laid the evidence of three murders. Knowing all these facts, we had become rather reconciled to not going up the river, and were surprised when father himself suggested it.

“You boys are a good deal older than you were when you first asked me. I am willing for you to go if you take Prince. He is the only man in Berkeley County who can talk with West McConnor.”

To take Prince meant that, whatever the success of the trip, we were assured of a comrade of good nature and good sense.

We wished to take the big .44 rifle, thinking that it might be an advantageous ally, but my father forbade it. He said we might take one of the light breech-loaders, if we liked, to shoot

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ducks in the river and squirrels in the cypresses along the banks; but we must limit our armament to that single piece.

We left the plantation at six o'clock on a warm December morning, taking the young flood up Warsaw Creek and out into the big Santee above Waterhon place. The three of us were well balanced in the long, light, dugout cypress canoe; each of us had a broad-bladed paddle. We swept up the long reaches and took the frequent bends with a speed and a precision of which we were proud; for it showed how nearly in unison we could work. But after five or six miles, when we had come to a point in the river where the tide no longer helped us, we lost our pride, and settled down to hard work. Buckled down though we were to heavy paddling, we could not help noticing and admiring the marvelous country through which we were passing—a country that we had never seen, and one that few white men had ever penetrated.

The Santee was here a quarter of a mile wide; its waters were almost as black as those that drain a wood stream in the southern coast

country. It was very deep, and flowed without sound or wave. So uniform was its current that the whole level expanse visible to the eye at any one moment appeared to move rather than to flow. The banks on either side were deeply wooded; and it seemed surprising that so far north of the equator the edges of a stream could show in winter such a dense growth of greenery. The cypresses prevailed; but there were many stately pines and cedars, hollies a hundred feet tall, and ancient live-oaks, massive and patriarchal. At some places we caught glimmering vistas between the stems of these trees; here and there canebrakes or tangled draperies of vines and creepers veiled from our eyes the mysterious forest beyond the river banks.

At last, about nine o'clock in the morning, when we were pretty well tired, we reached the landing place for the Bear Wallow settlement; and as we made the canoe fast, our hopes of regaining the Daisybank table rose high. We had at least accomplished the most difficult stage of the journey. From the rude landing the strange roadway, which seemed seldom

used, entered the dark and forbidding woods, and was lost to our sight in their mystery and shadows.

"Prince, how far is it to Bear Wallow?" I asked.

"'Tain't far, cap'n," he answered, gazing steadily at the dim opening in the forest; "it's only about two throws and a whoop."

"About how much?"

"If I throw a rock," the negro explained, "then get that rock and throw it again; then get it again, and then whoop, them people in Bear Wallow can hear me whooping."

We took our way into the woodlands with some misgivings. By the time we had come to the end of the second "throw," the thinning ranks of the pines showed that we were nearing the settlement. Soon we came to a cabin or two, and heard the voices of negroes; nor were we likely to hear any other voices there, for Bear Wallow was a negro colony, and not more than a half-dozen white men had ever even seen it.

As we were going up the road, an odd thing happened. From their play in the sandy roadway, three little negroes, innocent of clothes,

seeing us approach, dashed frantically toward the cabins; but, prompted by some instinct of instant self-preservation, they dropped down in the tall grass beside the path. I have seen a fawn do the same thing. When we came up, there they lay, huddled in hiding. They had never before seen a white man, and they imagined we were specters. Farther on, we came to the settlement proper, and noticed one house that seemed especially large, and that occupied a central position.

"Dat's West McConnor's," said Prince; "and, boss men, if we gwine to find dat table, it will be right in dat house."

Having heard so much about the desperate character whose home we were approaching, this man who ruled the remote settlement with an authority as complete as that of the chief of an African tribe, we had expected to see an extraordinary figure; or, at least, a man powerful physically, who could rule by the might of his strength. When we approached the house, West McConnor came out.

We were amazed to find him a small, almost wizened, mulatto. He actually looked shy; but

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his countenance was inexpressibly cunning and crafty. I understood then, with something akin to disappointment, that his fame as a hunter must have been procured by his stealth and intelligence rather than by his strength and endurance. He made a rather sinister, but not impressive, figure as he stood in his doorway, waiting for us to come up.

He greeted us civilly but coldly, and was so unlike the negroes we knew that we were completely baffled. With his sharp, shifting eyes, he questioned us searchingly, but his own dry speech was exceedingly uncommunicative. He accepted with grave thanks the gifts of tobacco, sugar, and coffee that we had brought; and even unbent so far as to ask after father. But it was clear that he wanted us to do most of the talking. That was just what we did not feel capable of doing; we were no match for this crafty little yellow man. So, while West stepped into the cabin for a moment to put away his gifts, we consulted with Prince.

"I tell you," Prince said, with a troubled look in his eyes, "you boss men go back of the potato



"WE WERE NO MATCH FOR THIS CRAFTY LITTLE YELLOW MAN"—Page 108

patch there to see the big 'gator heads dat West throws out, and leave him to me."

We did as Prince suggested, crossed the narrow field, climbed the fence, and came to an open space under the giant yellow pines—and to one of the strangest sights I have ever witnessed. The whole of that open space, and it could not have been less than an acre in area, was strewn with bleached alligator bones. The negro hunter, after taking the hide and a few steaks from the tail, had thrown the bodies out under the pines. We counted 119 skulls, and we did not count half of them. Some of the alligators must have been monsters, judging from the dimensions of their skulls. West McConnor had caught them from one end of the Santee delta to the other, and his toll had been heavy. From the innumerable teeth scattered about, we selected several dozen of the finest; then we returned to the negro cabins.

Prince was standing where we had left him, but West was nowhere in sight. Prince had told us beforehand that West would never argue or seek to drive a bargain; he simply stated his terms, and then often disappeared, leaving the

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actual settlement to his wife, or to one of his sons.

"Well, Prince?" I asked, as we came up.

"West say," Prince answered, somewhat dubiously, "dat he never stealed dat table, but he got it in his house."

"Where is he and what will he take for it?" my brother asked.

"West done gone." Prince grinned; we understood that West did not care to tell just how he had come by the table.

"He say," Prince continued, "he will let you have the table if you will give him yo' breech-loadin' gun."

Tom and I looked at each other, and agreed to make the trade, although of all things, we hated to put another gun into West McConnor's hands. The gun was not an expensive one, whereas the table was invaluable. Tom handed the weapon to Prince.

"Take it in, Prince. Who's in the house? His wife? All right. And don't come back without the table."

Presently, from the cabin, Prince emerged, bearing before him the exquisite table that we

knew at once must be the long-lost heirloom. We quickly saw that the little damage it had suffered during its thirty years of exile could be easily repaired.

Going home, we had the tide with us. We reached Hampton in safety; and what with the table and the wonderful assortment of alligator teeth we had brought, we were very happy.

So, after all, our loved neighbor got her wedding present. And she values it all the more because we told her the full story of its loss and its strange recovery.

IX

A LAGGARD IN LOVE

WHILE the recovery of the exquisite Daisybank table had been a very fortunate achievement, we had another experience in the matter of a wedding which might have proved disastrous. It was an extraordinary thing, being no less than the loss of a bridegroom.

On the old plantation, we were so far removed from all the ordinary movements of society that anything like a christening or a communion service was a tremendous event; while a marriage was positively revolutionary in its power of social upheaval. But, surely enough, that winter we were to have a wedding. A daughter of the rice planter immediately below us was to be married to a young lawyer from Charleston, Hayne Holbrook; and

as we knew all his family well, we invited his whole wedding party to come to our house a few days before the Day in order to be without fail on hand at the great appointed hour.

The distance between the two plantations being six miles, and our modes of conveyance being uncertain, we were especially scrupulous about arranging to have the entire bridegroom's party at the bride's home safely and in good time. Of this party, the bridegroom was naturally the most important, and we were very solicitous about his safe and timely delivery. After some grave councils had been held *en famille*, we decided to let young Holbrook go by boat instead of by road. There seemed to be several advantages in this: the river ran by both plantations, and the water route was a mile shorter than the land one; we had a good boat and Toby, an excellent negro, to paddle it, whereas our two buggies were somewhat decrepit, especially in the vital organs of springs and wheels; and our horses and mules had attained that age when animals stand still in roads when they are not being urged forward. Besides all this, Holbrook himself, when ap-

proached on the subject, said he would much prefer the boat trip. He naturally did not suggest it, but we guessed that it was on account of the promise of a romantic journey down the beautiful river at twilight,—a journey that would lead him to his bride. Indeed, nothing could have been planned which would have appealed more to the sentiment of a man like Holbrook. He was enthusiastic over the arrangement. We joked him a good deal about it, suggesting that if at the last moment his heart should fail him, he would have a good chance to keep straight on down the river and escape by a sea route.

The wedding was set for seven o'clock on an April evening. We planned to start the bridegroom down the river at half-past five; that would permit him to reach the other plantation in an hour, even if his paddler did little more than permit the stout cypress canoe to drift down with the ebb-tide. We would leave home as soon as we had seen the bridegroom safely off; such a start would enable us to reach the house shortly before the wedding. Hayne Holbrook's mother and one of his sisters we had

sent down to the bride's home earlier in the day. Our last word to them was that we would deliver the bridegroom intact before the appointed hour.

On a plantation it is an arduous undertaking to get ready for a wedding,—even for a neighbor's wedding. Ancient adornments are sought, and with many flutterings and misgivings, dresses are tried on, sighed at, and put away. Every one else in the house seeming very busy with this kind of thing, it was left for me to see the bridegroom off on his journey down the river. We had selected Toby to paddle him; and the negro had been instructed to wash out the boat, to dry it, and to put a deep layer of clean ricestraw in the bottom of it. It was half-past five when Holbrook and I started down for the wharf. I had some trepidation when I saw his immaculate dress suit, for I knew the staining power of Santee River mud. But this he covered by a long rain-coat. I could not help noticing that Holbrook's manner lacked the traditional nervousness ascribed to bridegrooms, for he seemed to be very composed, and he bade me good-bye in high spirits.

For a few moments I watched the canoe drift down the languorous waters of the beautiful river; then I turned and hurried back toward the house, feeling that, whatever might befall us, at least the bridegroom would reach the wedding safely.

There was great excitement at the house. Though all the people we were going to see at the wedding were old familiar friends, the occasion of our meeting would be quite extraordinary: this accounted for the impatience with which we regarded some of our hitherto perfectly respectable clothes, and the strange qualms we secretly felt over the historic, heirloom-like, solemn aspect of some of our adornments. I remember that Tom wore a ponderous watch-fob that had belonged to some portly ancestor, and that the weight of the fob actually seemed to alter my brother's standing posture. Then, too, as far as modes of conveyance were concerned, we could not hope to attain the wedding with any degree of style. A mule in a creaky buggy bears small resemblance to a coach-and-four. But we were a very happy

crowd as we set out at six o'clock for our neighbor's home.

We reached there shortly before seven; and we noticed with silent satisfaction that the vehicles tied in many parts of the ample plantation yard were in some cases so much more decrepit than ours that for them to hold together for any kind of a journey was a positive achievement. However, whatever mild satisfaction we had derived from a realization that we were coming to the wedding in a relatively creditable manner, was soon dissipated. Before we entered the front gate, which led into a wide rose-garden before the house, we were met by Holbrook's mother. Her deep agitation and anxiety were visible in her movements and in her features.

"Is Hayne with you?" she asked hurriedly; "he has not come by boat. We thought you might have changed your plans, and might have decided to bring him with you."

Her apprehension clearly increased as her glance searched our bewildered faces. Every one turned to me for an explanation, as I had been the one to see the bridegroom off.

"I saw him leave safely," I declared; "it was hardly half-past five. Hasn't he come?" I asked with obvious futility.

"We have had a watchman at the landing, but he has reported no sight of a boat," said Mrs. Holbrook.

We knew what this meant; for above the plantation landing there was a mile and a half of straight river-reach; and even after the canoe entered it, it would be twenty minutes before it reached the wharf. It would be impossible for the bridegroom to arrive at the appointed hour. Yet so abnormally exciting to our provincial plantation minds was this whole affair of the wedding that I believe we vaguely cherished the hope that in some miraculous manner our lost and essential bridegroom would appear to us out of the clouds. After his extraordinary disappearance, nothing would have seemed strange about a sudden, inexplicable reappearance.

The bridegroom's mother had expressed for us the tension, anxiety, and embarrassment of the whole household. And we, who seemed wholly responsible for the tragic situation, were

certainly not in a position to relax the tension. I felt that we could not face the crowd in the big house, now warmly aglow with the wedding candles; but I sensed the feverishness of the atmosphere there, and I could not help recalling vividly Byron's lines:

Ah, then and there was hurrying to and fro,
And gathering tears, and tremblings of distress,
And cheeks all pale, which but an hour ago
Blushed at the praise of their own loveliness.

As the situation called for immediate action, my brother volunteered to go down to the landing, and thence along the bank of the river northward toward the plantation. This route would lead him (in wedding attire) across marshes and through canebrakes; but what mattered it? A bridegroom was lost and had to be found. The bride of Young Lochinvar was not sought more frantically than we sought Holbrook: that poem reminds us that there was "racing and chasing on Canobie Lee;" and surely there was as much along the banks of the Santee. I can recall that at this critical juncture I began to recollect and to confuse old Bible stories relating to bridegrooms and their

coming, my only clear remembrance of them seeming to be that their coming had been attended by some kind of disaster. The doom of the last heir of Ravenswood likewise recurred to me:

The last heir of Ravenswood to Ravenswood shall
ride,
To meet a dead maiden to be his bride;
He shall stable his steed in the Kelpie's Flow,
And his name shall be lost forever more.

As Tom had chosen to pursue the course along the banks of the river, I decided to return home by road, and thence to follow Holbrook down the river in a boat. Selecting, therefore, the mule that seemed least fatigued by her recent trip, I slipped off her harness, cleared her from the buggy, and jumped on the melancholy creature's back. In all the world there was no mount less fitted for the occasion. I needed something romantic, fiery, lightning-swift. But this mule had long since passed the age when a mount can be made to realize the enthusiasm of the rider, and can respond by displaying spirit and speed. I finally got the creature to strike a hectic pace, which was ab-

ruptly relaxed as soon as I relaxed my urgings. By the time I had gone a mile from the plantation, the April twilight had deepened into a silvery dusk, and all over the silent pine woods a lacy mist was rising, mantling the forest in mystery. Not a soul did I meet on my lonely ride; the silence of the deep woods was broken only by my shouts to the mule, and the disproportionately loud sounds made by my cracking whip. The whole noisy performance seemed in strange contrast to the peace and serenity of the dim forest. Not a soul did I meet until, entering our own plantation gateway, two dark forms suddenly detached themselves from the deceptive night. As they hurried forward, I drew rein and hailed them.

One of the voices that answered was Holbrook's! The bridegroom had reappeared! With him was the ever-faithful Prince, who was guiding him toward the home of the bride. Because we had used all the animals to take us to the wedding, they were walking. And even in the dimness I could see that Holbrook no longer was wearing his immaculate dress-suit.

We hardly had time to exchange a word.

"We got caught on a snag in the river," Holbrook explained hurriedly as I gave him my seat on the back of the long-suffering mule.

"Ride hard," I said, "and Prince will go along with you to show you the way. I'll follow on foot. I'll not get there to see you married, but I'll be there to drink your health!"

To Prince I handed my whip.

"Run along beside her, Prince," I said; "and don't you let her feet touch the ground!"

In the dusky light I saw the reassuring gleam of the negro's teeth; then that strange cavalcade started. And on account of Prince's profound understanding of mule nature, it soon distanced me. But long after it had disappeared, I could hear the exhorting voice of the negro, and the stubborn pummeling of the mule's hoofs in the road.

An hour later, when I arrived, the wedding had been over for some time, and the bride and groom were on the eve of their departure. It was not until after they had gone that I learned the real story of Holbrook's mishap from my brother Tom.

"You know the tide was ebbing," he said;

"and Toby, instead of paddling out in the middle of the river, kept rather too close inshore. About two miles down, by the Big Bend, the boat ran herself on a snag that was just standing flush with the level of the water. The snag (so Toby, whom I met, told me) was very strong, and it had caught the boat in the very middle of its bottom. There it hung, swinging round and round, for all of Toby's pushing and paddling. I suppose the point of the snag must have worked a kind of a socket for itself in the soft cypress bottom of the boat.

"At last, in despair, Holbrook decided to swim ashore and return to our house. Toby remonstrated, and offered to get overboard himself to dislodge the canoe, but the bridegroom was excited. The distance to land was not great; so he stripped off his wedding clothes and plunged in. The rest you know: he walked back to the house and effected a change of clothes. Then he secured Prince and started for the wedding. Toby he sent down here; I met him about half way between here and home. The boat is still on the snag."

No man should be late to his own wedding; for such a man is a laggard in love. In one sense, Hayne Holbrook was; but in another, he assuredly was not.

X

THE WITCH POND SERPENT

NOT far from the river where our unfortunate bridegroom had been so cruelly delayed lay the great plantation road which, for a distance of fifteen miles, paralleled the Santee. It was on this road, not far from Hampton, I had an encounter one day with a monster,—a creature that I could not have believed existed in those woods.

Accurately to record the scenes of a life which is loved and vanished, one must restrain one's imagination so that the past will not be remembered only as a golden-vistaed domain, filled with little but romance, moonlight, and halcyon dreams, but a real region, and, like all mortal times and places, sometimes filled with the shadows of disappointment, anxiety and fear, as well as with the lights of love, joy, and peace.

This story of the Witch Pond serpent which I shall here record is associated chiefly with the emotion of fear; though it is related also to wonder, to the unusual, and to the extraordinary. Needless to say, it occurred literally as I relate it, and is to be explained only on those strange and eerie grounds to be suggested later.

Witch Pond is one of those sudden and spectral bodies of water that are found in the pine-wood districts of South Carolina; lonely, forbidding, black-watered, and heavily grown with silent straight tupelos and weeping cypresses. This pond is about half a mile from the old plantation gateway, on the left of the road as one goes out. At this point, immediately on the right of the road, is Spencer's Pond; originally these two had been one, but a causeway having been laid and heaped with sand, the road leading into the plantation was like an isthmus between two ponds. In time, trees and shrubs took root on the sides of the road, and through the screen of these, the passer-by could see the dark waters on either side glimmering.

This causeway was at the entrance to what

we called the Pretty Woods, which were virgin, dense of growth, dark and fragrant. Beyond, the great pine forest began to come into view—airy, full of sunshine, silence, and aromatic breezes.

Coming home from a ride or a drive, our horses would never quicken their pace, as horses do when they realize that they are nearly home, until they came to Witch Pond, when they invariably broke from a walk into a trot or from a trot into a gallop. Naturally our imaginations associated these accustomed actions with some sinister aspect of the mysterious ponds, of which the horses' instinct made them cognizant; and not without a cause did we believe thus. Twice I had killed big alligators in Witch Pond, and once, when our hounds took a deer across Spencer's Pond, they returned to us cowed and silent, while the deer never again reappeared. We supposed that a 'gator had caught the deer, and that the hounds had witnessed that tragedy of the wild.

It was past Witch Pond that I used to ride to school. Every day during a period of four years I rode five miles to a neighbor's house,

where the children of adjacent plantations were instructed; and on those long rides I had an unusual and delightful opportunity to study all kinds of life in those wonderful woods, almost primeval in their beauty and in the birds and animals which they harbored. It was seldom that I followed the beaten track; but rode through the pinelands at random, and was often, I fear, late to school for that reason.

One March morning, in the year 1894, when the warmth of the early springtime was flushing into bridal bloom even the ancient live-oaks and the patriarchal cypresses, I was riding happily through the Pretty Woods, and had come almost to Witch Pond, when my attention was casually attracted by what I supposed to be a log lying across the causeway. There had been no storm; but I easily accounted for the log's being there by supposing that the dead shaft of a pine, standing long by reason of the strength of its solid heart, had at length given way at the bottom, and had been tumbled across the road. Hardly a month before I had found such a tree in the road near the avenue gateway.

There was a freshet in the river; and this had caused the water of Witch Pond to rise, so that now it was trickling into the deep sandy rut on the left of the road. The smallest incident of life is unique, and is often impressive even when not accompanied by vivid circumstances. I can remember the exact appearance of that particular spot as it looked twenty years ago.

I was riding a young horse whose habit was to keep an unnecessarily sharp vigil for objects at which to shy, and I knew that he saw the log; so I paid no particular attention to it, except that as we reached it I tightened rein so that my mount would not stumble.

As the horse put his right forefoot over it, I glanced down—and I saw the dead tree move! I was aware, in a sudden shock of dazed understanding, that the huge body spanning the road was a part of the length of a great serpent, whose identity was wholly unknown to me. At the same time, the horse winded it, and probably saw it move, for he gave a tremendous bound, almost unseating me. For fifty yards he ran like the wind, snorting and tossing his

head; then I got control of him. Turning him, I looked back and there saw the serpent lying his full length in the road, his head toward me.

In our life on the plantation, my brother and I had an unusual variety of experiences with snakes and reptiles of many kinds; and with the assistance of a quaint old book entitled, "Reptilian Life in the Carolinas," we had identified a large number of species. We knew well the rattlesnakes and their pilots; the beautiful kingsnake, which we used to call the thunderbolt; the deadly cotton-mouth moccasin; the harlequin snake; the black racer, and many others. As far as our knowledge then extended, and we have since become assured that in that (solitary) particular it needed no supplement, the largest snake in the Santee country was the great diamond-backed rattler of the deep swamps; in length, but not in size, the black-snake and the kingsnake sometimes equaled him. Occasionally a huge moccasin would be killed; but the most venomous variety of this species does not grow large.

This Witch Pond serpent that now lay in the road before me literally dwarfed the great ten-

foot diamond-back which some negro lumbermen had brought out of the Laurel Hill swamp. It was so much larger than any snake that I had ever dreamed could be found in those woods that I turned my horse this way and that, so that I could be really sure that I was seeing what I saw. My survey satisfied me fully: there could be no doubt of the proportions of this monstrous serpent which, unaccountably, had invaded the peaceful woods through which I had long been accustomed to ride.

My father had always advised me to face a difficulty directly; so I made up my mind that then and there the big snake and I were going to have it out. At least, I meant to determine, if possible, his exact nature, and the spirit he would show if he were given a chance to fight. But my horse did not at all share my eagerness to approach the snake; being unpossessed of the scientific instinct, but having a good deal of common-sense instinct, his only desire was for flight. And possibly his discretion was more becoming the situation than was my valor.

At any rate I dismounted, tethering my horse to a pine sapling; I used a light half-hitch tie,

so that if necessary I could free him in a moment.

Then I took a short turn in the woods in search of the right kind of a pole with which to attack the reptile. I rejected stout young hickories that would amply have sufficed for any snake of my former acquaintance. I eyed a stately-shafted yellow pine, wishing that I had the prowess to wield such a bludgeon. I half hoped that when I returned to the road, the serpent, with a wisdom in keeping with his size, would have presaged my attack, and would have disappeared. But on my return to the road, armed with a twenty-foot pine pole, there lay the Witch Pond serpent, apparently waiting for me.

The weight of my weapon was so great for a boy ten years old that I decided to lift it into proper position before beginning my attack, and to advance on the snake with the pole poised above me. This I did, walking slowly down the road, ready to strike if he should make a move toward me, and fully ready to run, should my blow prove ineffective.

The great snake did not move, but I could see

him watching me sleepily, with a dull light glaring glazedly out of his metallic eyes. I had long since learned, from an experience with a rattlesnake pilot, to distrust the sleepy look of a snake, and I was not deceived now.

At last I came within striking distance; I must have been about fifteen feet from the head of the reptile. This was as near as I ever got to him, and I measured him carefully with my eye. And I knew then that whatever might be the success of my venture, I should have a marvelously strange story to tell those at home, and I wanted to be sure of my facts.

The head of the snake was as broad as a man's hand, and shaped not unlike it; in length, I took him to be fifteen feet; his body was from a foot to a foot and a half in circumference; his coloring was an uncertain brown, with hints of brighter shades, which the swamp mud through which he had crawled had discolored and partly concealed. I have since seen in a zoo a serpent that looked somewhat like this; but whether this one which I saw at Witch Pond was an anaconda, a boa, or a python, I could not then tell, nor can I now say.

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Being as I conceived within a vital distance of the snake, I decided to strike the blow that I knew would create instant and wonderful developments; but there was one result for which I was wholly unprepared, and that was the only one that happened.

With all the force that the falling weight of the pole and that of my own strength could give, I brought my weapon down on the broad head of the serpent. The blow rebounded as if it had been dealt to a huge ball of rubber; the snake itself, instead of writhing in pain, appeared simply to be slightly annoyed, and lifted its head and three or four feet of its body several inches from the road. If I were to describe the expression that I believed I then saw in that snake's face, I should call it bored disdain, touched with awakening menace.

The blow had been fair, and I had no reason to believe that I could give one more effective than the first one had been. Besides, under the circumstances, it was not very hard for me to persuade myself that it would not be right to get late to school just for the sake of a snake. So I tossed the pole over into the bushes, turned,

and ran down the road toward my horse. I had to make myself walk before I reached him, because my excitement excited him, and he came very near getting loose.

When from his back I again looked toward Witch Pond, there lay the serpent in that strange position of indolent menace.

I was not late to school that morning; for my horse seemed to wish, with no uncertain fervor, to put all possible distance, with all speed, between himself and Witch Pond and what was lying there.

On my return in the afternoon, I could, by no force of persuasion, get my horse within fifty yards of the causeway by the ponds; so I turned through the woods and went into the plantation by the upper gate.

Riding up under the big live oak in front of the house, I met my father, and told him of my adventure. At first he made light of it and laughed at the power of my imagination, which he said my schooling was developing "elaborately." But, seeing that my seriousness was genuine, he told a negro who had come up to saddle his horse. In a little while we were on

the road to the scene of my morning's experience.

We tied our horses a hundred yards from the causeway, and approached on foot. As we drew near, I was glad to see that the freshet water had not covered the road; but it was flowing over in one place; and the pathway it had over part of the distance was the trough made in the soft sand by the serpent. I pointed out the trail to father, showing him just where the piled sand indicated where the big snake had turned when my horse stepped over him.

Like a true woodsman, father got down on his knees to examine the "sign." When he got up he whistled softly.

"He surely was here," was his comment; "but he certainly doesn't belong in this country. We have no native snake of that size."

We followed the easy slot down to Spencer's Pond, where it disappeared in the black waters of that silent lagoon. We felt that we had reached the end of that mysterious trail, and with wonder not a little mingled with awe we turned homeward.

On the ride back father had few words to say,

and I could see that he was puzzled and was thinking deeply. As we reached the gate, coming out of the dark avenue into the sunny enclosure of the "home fields," he looked up from his reverie.

"Do you remember," he asked quietly, "the big Spanish barque, the *Theresa*, that was wrecked off Cedar Island? I recollect now that it was rumored that she had aboard a good many specimens for some zoological garden. This snake you saw may have gotten away from some smashed crate in that wreck. Now, I wonder if I'm not right?"

I think he must have been; though to verify his opinion we never saw or heard of the great Witch Pond serpent again.

XI

THE TERROR OF BURNT BAY

IF my meeting with the Witch Pond serpent had been strange, it could hardly be accounted more so than what happened to us when we went after the creature that we called the Burnt Bay Champion.

While most of the adventures that my brother Tom and I experienced on the plantation were of an amusing and interesting rather than of a thrilling nature, there was at least this one that was to us tremendously exciting; and to this day I can not recall it without a quickening pulse and a mind that begins to glow with the warmth of true adventure. This was the memorable encounter that we had with the formidable wild white boar of Burnt Bay.

Few people who are not familiar with the wooded regions of the great South Atlantic sea-

board have any clear conception of the vast extent of the pinelands. For example, setting out from our own plantation, we could drive fifty miles in any one of three directions, and be driving all the while through forests of pine, swamps of cypress, gum, and tupelo, and along causeways flanked by dense primeval thickets of bay and myrtle. All these woods are divided into dry sandy ridges, deep swamps, and "bays." These last are coverts of bushes and briars, usually marking the courses of sluggish streams. These bays are resorts for many wild animals. They are havens for deer, wildcats, and foxes; and they are refuges for the wild hogs that roam the pineland wilderness. The forerunners of these hogs had originally been tame; but having wandered from the plantations, they had developed all the traits of wildness, and they were almost as secret and crafty as the deer and the foxes. When hunting we sometimes saw these wild hogs, but we seldom made any attempt to molest them; indeed, they were so exceedingly well able to take care of themselves that we hardly ever had opportunity to trouble them.

A few miles from the plantation there was a very large bay, several hundred acres in area. During a dry spell one summer this area had been burnt off; but with the usual fecund swift-ness of growth of green things in the South, the bushes and vines had soon not only covered the signs of the fire's devastation, but had actually made the covert more dense than ever. On account of the treacherous footing and the huge vines that everywhere made entangle-ments, no horse could be ridden through it. Even hounds, which have an extraordinary fa-cility for going anywhere, were often baffled by the apparently endless mazes of the place. Such was Burnt Bay, where we had our adventure.

It was our negro comrade Prince who brought us word of the great white boar in Burnt Bay. He told us that while sitting still in the woods near the bay, looking for fox-squirrels, he had seen the boar come out on a little ridge not far off, and that he had had a good view of the creature. From the expres-sion on Prince's face when he told us the tale we were convinced that he was somewhat un-certain of the reality of what he had seen. His

look suggested that he might have seen what he would call a "hant."

I remember that Tom and I were standing under a big live-oak in the backyard when Prince told us his story. It was a bright mid-winter morning; just such a day as would be found in New England in late October. After Prince had described the incident with that remarkable accuracy of detail that he possessed, even sketching with a stick in the sand a rude map of the Burnt Bay district, we were able to visualize the whole scene.

"Dar he is," said Prince, pointing to the southern end of the bay.

"Well, Prince," said my brother, in the tone of one ready to accept a challenge, "if he is there, what are we going to do about it?"

"Let's go after him, of course," I said; "the old hound Singer will hold that hog."

Prince gave his chuckling laugh.

"Oh, my," he said, "befo' we can catch him, he will catch we! Oh my, but I sorry for ole Singer. He will sing to-day like he never done sing befo'."

Out of the sheer gayety that was ours in an-

ticipation of a rare adventure in the wild woods, we joined in the negro boy's laughter. Prince seldom failed to make a situation comic; and in his humor there was always fun. That was one reason why the three of us were kept so close.

This thing which we had undertaken we meant to carry through at once. Straightway therefore Tom went into the house to get some buckskin thongs with which to tie up our prize when we had subdued him; Prince and I went down toward the rice-barn to loose old Singer. We found the dog asleep in the sun.

"Take yo' rest," Prince said pityingly, "'caze dar will be no mo' rest for you dis day! He do look so innocent," the negro added; "he don't know how we is gwine to swindle him dis day. Wake up, Singer!" he called, clapping his hands and dancing a shuffle in front of the dog, "I think you is gwine to cross Jordan to-day!"

Singer awoke, beat his tail without emotion, and blinked at us. But when I had slipped his collar and patted his head, he jumped up and followed us willingly enough. Tom was wait-

ing for us by the house, and we set off down the road for the big woods. In less than an hour we were in sight of Burnt Bay.

It was a beautiful yet peculiarly lonely scene on which we looked. And though we were only boys out for an adventure we could not help feeling the influence of those solitary woods, with their glimmering vistas far-stretched between their ranks of pines; with the soft and mysterious waving of the level yellow broom-grass, sibilant to the merest wind; with the wide sunlit expanse of the silent bay before us, shimmering as only the heart of the woods can shimmer on a strangely tranquil winter day. The air was full of aromatic spiceries from the pines and with damp sweet odors drifting to us from the sphagnum-bedded copse ahead of us. We three sat on a fallen pine log and considered the situation. Singer, in a very unsportsman-like manner, lay down at our feet and fell asleep.

"Right yonder," explained Prince, pointing to a little sandy ridge that spanned like a natural causeway two small savannas of the bay, "is where I done see him."

"What do you think is the best way to go about hunting this white boar, Prince?" I asked.

Thus appealed to directly, Prince became serious. He said that such a creature as we were after would likely have a very limited range. "He's right in yonder now," he added, nodding toward the thicket of baffling density; "and if we is gwine to get him, we have to go in dar after him, 'caze he ain't coming out here to us."

"If Singer gets on his trail and jumps him, what will he do? Will he run or will he stand to bay?" I could catch in Tom's tone a note of anxiety, and I could guess that he was concerned over what might happen to our faithful old hound.

"The boar will run," said Prince, "but he won't run far; and when old Singer begins to bay, we must be there."

Prince seemed very serious and emphatic about this.

"Could you see if the boar had very long tusks, Prince?" I asked.

Prince put out his arm, drew up his sleeve,

and measured on his dusky wrist a space of at least ten inches.

"Like that," he said, "and I could see them away yonder. And when I dreamed about them that night, they were as long as my arm," he added with his smile and chuckle.

"Fine trophies," said Tom abruptly; "let's make them ours."

Together, then, we set out. Soon we were in the edges of the bay. Here we agreed to separate some fifty yards and to walk abreast toward the ridge on which the white boar had been seen. Our progress was a continual struggle; for we were either stepping inadvertently on quaking quagmires, or were waylaid by stiffly matted branches, or were ambushed by huge briars with poisonous thorns. Old Singer fared better than we, for he followed the secret byways of the many wild creatures which haunted that gross thicket. We had not gone more than halfway to the ridge when Singer barked sharply. A moment later, quite near me, there seemed to be an explosion in the bay-bushes. Then there was a wild rushing toward an almost impenetrable section of the thicket ahead.

I could see nothing but the violent shaking of the bushes as some creature bounded through them, but I knew from the penetrating tangy odor that we had started a wild hog, and probably the one for which we were looking. Old Singer was hot on the trail. Indeed, either on account of the speed of the hound or the truculence of the boar, the chase did not last more than a few minutes. In the depths of the gloomy thicket ahead I heard the hound begin to bay. Shouting to Tom and Prince to follow, I broke my way as rapidly as possible through the ever-increasing density of the vines and bushes; and sooner than I expected I was confronted by the wall of the jungle into which the wild boar had plunged, and where now he was standing off the dog. A premonition (possibly born of Prince's warning) came to me that the boar was going to kill the hound; so I decided not to wait for my brother and the negro. Indeed, to wait would have been useless; for as I looked back they were still more than a hundred yards off; and from the direction which they were following it was evident that they were trying to reach the ridge, from which they

would have access to the other side of the thicket in which the wild boar was being bayed. With one more look about me to get my bearings, I turned into the dismal brake, and broke my way into it as best I could.

That such a place of savage wildness should be so close to the plantation seemed strange to me. I would have wished to examine it more carefully, but there was no time for that. Prince had said that we must be on the spot when old Singer bayed; and I was doing my best to be there. It never occurred to me at the time, so great was my excitement, that I was rushing in alone and weaponless upon a very dangerous animal. But too much prudent caution robs life of many a fine hazard. True, I remembered the story of a wild boar of our woods that had killed five dogs and had cut three negroes, but I could not stop for that.

After a desperate struggle, breathless, with deep briar-wounds over the whole of my body, I came quite suddenly upon the boar and the hound. In a shallow pool of water, in a tiny arena deep in the heart of the brake, the two were facing each other. The boar was grim, si-

lent, bristling; the dog was baying frantically, and trying to maneuver for an opening. The boar's back was turned to me, and I saw that a natural opening in the bushes led up to him. The chance for me to achieve a master-stroke appeared excellent. If I could creep up on the huge beast and get him securely by the hind legs, with the help of Singer I might hold him until Tom and Prince could break through the thicket to my aid. The great boar of Burnt Bay, and the triumph of catching him single-handed seemed to be within my grasp. There was nothing to deter my approach, though the creature's formidable size might have been considered ample reason for hesitating. Crouching low, I slipped cautiously forward. Already both hands were extended for the grasp.

But something warned the boar of my approach. He might not have known exactly where I was, but he realized that an ally of the hound was near. He champed his jaws viciously, lifted his head quickly, and then whirled like a flash and charged me. Whether he meant to attack, or merely had decided to rush away from the imminent danger which he

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apprehended, I could not tell. But I saw the savage head, the gleaming red eyes, the fearful tusks. My crouching position, the tunnel-like opening into which I had wedged myself, and the sudden fury of the boar's rush made my peril a deadly one. I had no defense. . . . It was old Singer that saved me. Though a hound is not usually good at holding a hog, Singer leaped after the boar and caught him just as he was on me.

As soon as the dog gripped him from behind, the boar whirled savagely, gave a cruel toss of his head, which threw the hound clear across the shallow pool, and then rushed off through the brake in a flight full of defiant strength. The last glimpse I got of the grizzled brute gave such an impression; but it was a fleeting one, for my eyes were on poor Singer, lying helpless against the bay-bushes. As I waded over toward the dog, I shouted to Tom and Prince, and they answered me. They were not far off, for I could hear them wrestling with the big swamp-briars.

As I neared the dog, his eyes, which had been closed, opened slowly, and his tail beat the

water feebly. I knelt beside him on the sphagnum moss, examining him for the wounds that I felt sure the dreadful tusks had made. No wound was visible! I rolled the dog over. His other side was unscarred!

"Why, you old fraud!" I exclaimed, "I don't believe he hurt you at all."

At this rebuke the hound got to his feet, transferred by a violent shaking all the water from his soaked coat to my face, and began once more to look interested in life. Just then, all excitement, Tom and Prince broke through the screen of bays.

"Where is he?" cried my brother.

Prince said nothing, but he evidently understood what had happened.

"The big boar," I explained, "*was* here; but Singer and I got tired of holding him. He had an engagement somewhere else, and we didn't like to interfere with his plans."

Prince chuckled. "He is sho' the boss of dis bay," he said.

I told them just what had happened, and they listened wide-eyed. Old Singer, sitting on his haunches, seemed gravely to approve my

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account. When I dwelt on the great size and the apparent ferocity of the boar, Prince gave a wary look behind him.

"Cap'n," he said, "sun is 'most down, and we is a long ways from home. And we ain't the boss of Burnt Bay," he added significantly.

Together, then, we set out for the plantation, old Singer leading the way. This behavior of the hound amused Prince.

"So," he said to the dog, "Mr. Singer, you is gwine home. And you is gwine to get dar first. But there's no need for you to hold dat tail so high, 'caze you ain't done nothing but lost your breath!"

Ever after that day, when the three of us had not much else to do, Prince would say, "Let's go catch the Burnt Bay boss!"

But it was a kind of hunting dangerous to dogs and to men; so we never again molested the champion of Burnt Bay.

XII

A FORGOTTEN SHARK LINE

DURING the summer which followed our experience with the wild boar of the pinelands, a thing happened on a fishing trip that seems to me worth recording as a genuinely thrilling adventure.

My brother and I seldom set out from the village on a fishing expedition without taking with us a shark line. Yet, while we liked to have it with us, it was not often that we put it out, unless the regular fishing was poor or unless we happened to be in an adventurous mood. When one is fishing for shark from a small boat, one cannot pay much attention to the hand-lines. And since there were a good many families in the village to whom we supplied fish regularly, it was necessary for us to make the most of our time while we were an-

chored at the right stages of tide over the fishing drops. Sometimes, when the flood got high and we were tired, we would toss the shark line out, and seldom without getting a strike.

But, contrary to general opinion, shark-fishing is not great sport; when firmly hooked, the big fish soon becomes sullen and sluggish; and I have seen more than one ten-foot gray creature towed to the side of a small row-boat and killed by a well-directed blow on the head. When once landed, a shark is worse than useless; though occasionally we used to feed the hounds on shark-steak, and used to cut off and save broad strips of shark-skin which, when dried, makes excellent sand-paper. Shark-fishing becomes a real sport only when some plan of the fisherman goes awry so as to introduce into the contest elements of uncertainty and danger. Such a thing occurred once in awhile, as the following adventure can testify.

A shark line is composed of the hook, the fall or chain, the float, and the line itself. The hook is usually about ten inches long and $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch in diameter. We used one that the blacksmith in the village made for us out of a

steel spindle that had come from a cotton mill. The fall is a small chain about four or five feet long, one end of which is attached by a swivel to the hook, while the other is fastened to the float. This device is to break the force of the shark's first strike, to render him less formidable to play, and to tire him out quickly. An oar or a piece of board will do for a float; but probably the best thing is a big bottle, corked tight. We found a demijohn, with its convenient handle through which we could pass the fall, a most effective float. For our waters, shark lines are made about sixty feet long, and of a good quality of hemp or cotton. Ours was a cotton plow-line, a little larger than the average clothesline.

On such an arrangement of tackle we had landed many a shark. Twice we had to resort to the last resort in shark-fishing: that is to toss overboard the block of wood to which the end of the line in the boat is attached. When our game was more than the demijohn or we could conveniently manage, we just heaved the whole line clear of the boat, and let the big fish play himself until he was exhausted. When the line

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was set we always kept the block of wood on one of the seats, clear of any other tackle, so that by tossing it out we should be free of danger.

On this day we had made a fair catch of black fish on the hard bottom at Sett Creek, had landed a few sea trout and whiting at the Point, and had finally anchored for the late fishing at Jones' Stake, a very deep fishing drop at the confluence of four creeks. We let the anchor slide to its mooring, and the boat swung into place on the flood. While we were getting our lines ready, we heard a rush near the shore; then we saw foam, a running wave, and at last a high gray fin that ripped the water.

"He's a buster," said my brother; "and I believe he's come in on the flood from the bay. Let's set for him."

"All right. But we can't do much other fishing."

"Oh, we needn't pay any attention to it until he strikes. The whole thing is his affair up until that time."

So Tom drew out the shining hook and chain from beneath the stern seat, hooked through

the tail a large catfish, and dropped the lure, followed by the demijohn float, overboard. It so happened that at the moment both he and I had good strikes on our hand-lines, and in attending to them we let the shark line take care of itself, and drift out to its place some fifty feet behind the boat.

Sharks are especially fond of catfish (known in some waters as bullheads), but for very good reasons will never bite one above the dorsal stinger. Many times we had thrown dead catfish overboard just to see the sharks take them. Though the crafty scavengers would be nowhere in sight at the time, the lure would float a few moments only before a fin, or several of them, would rise and would circle faster and faster in rings which concentrated on the floating fish. Finally there would be a straight rush, a leap, then tossing waters, colored with foam and blood, whence would soon emerge on the still tide the head of the catfish. If one visits the eyries of fish-hawks or bald eagles along the Southern coast, one will find the ground beneath them strewn with the skulls and heads of catfish. As a rule, the ospreys seize these in the

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harbors, bays, and inlets; and the eagles either take them from the ospreys in lonely remote places, or sometimes range above the beaches for them, where they are stranded by the receding tide. A visitor to such haunts has to watch his footing; for after the refuse fish under the eyries there are nearly always cotton-mouth moccasins to be found; and they are almost as venomous as rattlers.

At Jones' Stake that day the fishing was unusually good. I caught two corvalli, rare luck indeed; while my brother, who had thrown his line out near a big oyster bank, hooked, and landed after a hard fight, a very fine sheephead. It was while we were congratulating ourselves on the great piece of good fortune, and thinking that perhaps our next strike might be a drum-fish or a black sea-bass, that our shark line, which we had completely forgotten, gave a sudden rasp as it sped out along the edge of the boat. And as we both gasped out "shark," and together reached for the line to clear it, our light rowboat gave a sickening lurch over; down went the gunwales, and in surged the water.

The oak block on the end of the line had become jammed under the middle seat; the shark had taken the bait and had run with it on the other side of the boat. And here were we, trying to right her by climbing up on the tipped side, with the taut line dragging, dragging, dragging us over.

"It's your buster, Tom," I said.

"Must be a whale-chaser," he answered. "I can't see our demijohn anywhere. Have we got him or has he got us?"

"If she goes over, hang to her bottom."

Just then the line slacked, the demijohn bobbed to the surface, and our boat sank slowly into her place. She settled back half-full of water; while our fish and tackle were floating everywhere in confusion. I saw my two corvalli and Tom's big sheephead swimming calmly about, bumping their noses against the stays and their backs against the bottom of the middle seat. But such things I saw only incidentally as I fumbled desperately under water with the jammed block of wood. I couldn't budge it.

"Hand me the hatchet," I called to Tom, who was trying his best to bail the boat with

the small tin can that we had. He felt round in the water for it, ran foul of a catfish sting, jerked his hand away; then continued the search with that increased energy that a smarting pain, gotten in its pursuit, always engenders. At last he found it; but as he leaned forward to put it into my eagerly outstretched hand, down went the demijohn with a thump, the rope was swept taut in a moment, and over went our boat on her side again. We both grasped the upper gunwale and hung on, while under us we could see our day's catch of fish floating out on the tide. The tall gray back of the sheephead swept quietly over the submerged side, and disappeared into the green water.

"Let him go," said Tom, as he saw me make a motion downward to intercept the sheephead's escape. "Let him go and take this."

He handed me the hatchet. Holding it by the tip of the handle, I could get a swinging blow downward at the wedged block; and by a lucky stroke I knocked it clear. It sprang out, and was literally dashed under the water and out of sight.

Slowly our boat sank back into her place, with the water almost flush with her gunwales. Tom and I sat down on the bow and stern, looked at each other, and laughed. It was the only thing worth doing. Nearly all our fish were gone. One oar had floated away. We were wet up to the waist. And we were almost afraid to heave in the anchor for fear that its weight in addition to the water we were carrying might sink our craft. But it was our best chance for speedily drying the boat; so, while my brother gingerly lightened the anchor from the bottom, I paddled our bathtub up the tide toward a sandbar. Here, when the water grew shallow enough, we stepped overboard, drawing the boat inshore, where we soon had her emptied, and our belongings in ship-shape. From where we stood we could see other sharks striking at the fish which had floated away from us; and we left them to their feast, having had enough of sharks for that day.

After having recovered our oar, we turned back into the creek that would take us home.

"What about our shark line?" Tom asked,

by a dip of the oars staying and turning the boat on the sedge-littered, foampied flood. "Shall we go after it?"

"That shark can't have gone very far in this short time. And surely those two floats will tire him down."

We rowed out on the big open creek, and searched its wide reaches for our floats. Far down the broadest stretch of water, leading to the Point and from there to Sett Creek and Bull's Bay, we saw what we thought must be our demijohn, like a black speck on the glistening water.

"He's pulling out for home," Tom said. "And I think we might as well do the same thing."

And so we did.

A week later, while we were anchoring our boat in the marsh to fish off the high point of Sett Creek for school-bass, we found our shark line, tangled and bedraggled. It was, however, intact, except that against the stout chain there were raspings of big teeth, while the long gleaming hook, made of tempered steel, was almost

straightened. And when we saw that, we both agreed that it was just as well that we had decided to let the powerful shark have the line all to himself.

XIII

THE WISDOM OF "SOLOMON"

SHORTLY after our return to Hampton for the winter, we made the acquaintance of "Solomon," of whose remarkable mental ability I shall give this example.

Of the many wild creatures with which we were familiar on the plantation, the fox we accounted the most crafty and cunning, the rabbit the most foolish and innocent, the wild turkey the wariest, the owl the most apparently wise, and the raccoon the most really wise. To us, a raccoon seemed to have more judgment than a fox, far more common sense than a rabbit, less dangerous precipitancy than a turkey, and a great deal more wisdom than a blinking owl. An owl is certainly an impressive-looking bird, but he cannot be said to do anything worthy of his dignity and his air of superiority. But we

knew some wonderfully wise things that a raccoon can do; and that was why we called the Sam Hill raccoon "Solomon."

We were such old friends with that wary old creature that had we actually caught him in one of our many chases after him, we should have been a little embarrassed. Stories of his craftiness came to us often, chiefly through Prince, who seemed to have a genuine affection for the sly resident of Sam Hill. Solomon had haunts of which we did not know; but we knew that he was usually to be found on this hill—a peninsula of pines that jutted out into the Mainfield River from the negro burying ground. And often, in the black mud that rimmed the edges of the hill, we had seen his tracks, which looked as if they had been made by tiny human hands.

In August, when the corn in the big field near by was in ear, Solomon would frequently come out of the woods, and, evidently leading a whole family with him, would work destruction among the rows, tearing down more ears than he and his followers could ever eat. Sometimes on winter nights the hounds would set up a sudden clamor, and take a hot trail down to the river

bank, where they would either lose it, or carry it out of hearing. At such times we felt sure that Solomon had been inspecting the chicken houses; and we attributed the loss of several fine, half-grown game birds to his forays.

One night, when Tom and I were coming back from duck shooting on the island, we saw a large raccoon watching us from the moonlit bank, and we were so sure that it was Solomon that we did not shoot. How long he had been looking at us I do not know, but as soon as he perceived that we had seen him, he disappeared into the dense canebrake.

A still autumn night, crisp, but not cold; a great yellow moon flooding the rice-fields; a wide stretch of woods, swamp thickets joining pine barrens; a pair of good coon dogs, keen on a scent, steady on a trail, and patient in treeing; those are the only essentials for a Southern raccoon hunt—except the hunters themselves. And hunters were my brother Tom, Prince, the negro boy, and I.

One November evening, when the full moon got up almost as soon as the sun had sunk behind the western pines, Prince came to the house

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for us, and soon we were in deep consultation. For a long time we had been planning to try to outwit Solomon, and this night appeared propitious for such an undertaking. We decided to take no guns; for a gun is hard to carry through the woods at night, and can seldom be used. We imparted our glad tidings to Ranger and Drum, the two hounds that we had taught to follow coons. The other hounds, either from jealousy or from disdain, seemed to regard our night expeditions with suspicion and scorn. Pure-blooded deerhounds they were, and were supposed to follow nothing but a deer, although I suspect they would have been glad enough to help us with Solomon. But with father's permission, we had "corrupted" Ranger and Drum, and he had made us promise that we would not spoil the noses of the others. These two appeared as eager for a nocturnal chase as we; they always understood our plans when we brought them some supper before supper time, patted them, and charged them to do wonders for us.

When we started, the moon was above the big water oak that stood beside the barn. Tom

and I were dressed for the night and the woods; our most distinguishing feature of garb was the high leather leggings that father insisted on our wearing, for October and November are among the worst rattlesnake months of the year on Santee. Each of us carried a heavy stick, with which to beat our way through the brush, and Prince brought along an ax.

Our course took us by the stables, where the ruminating cattle eyed us drowsily; then along a high ditch bank, overgrown with wild-plum bushes. This bank would lead us to the burying ground, the edge of which we could skirt until we came to Sam Hill. We wanted to cut off Solomon's retreat into the graveyard; once there, he was safe, for we never hunted in that wild but sacred jungle, where all things were afforded sanctuary.

We kept the dogs in close, and as quiet as possible, although Drum was forever whining on the trail of what Prince called "some varmint"—probably a rabbit or a rat. We found that there was one great danger in training dogs to follow animals inferior to those for the hunting of which they have been bred; they

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descend rapidly in the scale, until a full-blooded staghound may be found frittering away his time on field mice, or the gray rats that live along ditch banks.

We had passed the shadowy graveyard,—much to Prince's relief,—and had come close to the Sam Hill thicket, when Ranger gave a sudden yelp, and tore off down the edge of the bog that separated the burying ground from Sam Hill. The ground was soft where he trailed, and the moonlight lay so bright upon it that we easily distinguished the tracks of a very large coon. To our delight, the dogs had him "straightened"; that is, they were not running the back track. Prince's joy knew no bounds. He cut a double shuffle on the pine straw, laughed as only a negro can laugh, and sang an old verse that was probably as old as the plantation itself:

"O raccoon is a cunning thing,
He trabbles in the dark,
And he never knows where danger is
Till he yeddy [hears] old Ranger bark."

"Come on, Prince, and quit your fooling!" called Tom, who was some distance ahead of us.

We caught up with him on the run, following the dogs as best we could, laughing, shouting, running down the moonlit lanes of the woods, and often crashing into thin ambushes of brush and briars. Ahead of us, along the edge of Sam Hill, Drum and Ranger were making the air ring with their chorus. They seemed to know that it was Solomon they were pursuing. Or perhaps it was the beauty of the night that put them into a perfect mood for the chase; for we had never known them to follow so fast or to chime so well. It was not difficult to keep close to them when they struck across Sam Hill, for under the great yellow pines that stood there the ground was smooth and open. All out of breath, we came to a halt on the crest of the gentle ridge that had been dignified by the name of "hill."

The dogs were down the slope ahead of us. Through the black-stemmed pines we could see the moon shining on the water in the Mainfield, for it was then "flowed." Unless Solomon showed wonderful wisdom now, we were sure of him; before him was the open water, and behind him we had shut off his escape. He could

not double and pass us, for we were too close on him, and had run him too nearly to earth; and only by passing us could he return to the graveyard and safety. He might take to the water; but then his chance of escape would be small indeed, for on the farther shore were the open fields and the negro cabins. According to our ideas, the only thing left for him to do was to take to one of the moss-draped cypresses standing on the edges of the water.

"We've got him sure," said Tom.

"Raccoon is a tricky critter," Prince said, laughing; "but he can't run like a dog."

Then we saw the big coon we were following. He had puzzled the dogs in a thick clump of myrtle bushes; and while they were still nosing there, he was pacing craftily round the end of the hill, deliberately, in our very sight, striking for his ancient haunt in the burying ground. It took only a short run to cut him off, and when he turned he was only a few yards away. Then Solomon did a strange thing. Instead of falling over himself in an attempt to escape, he eyed us steadily, with his head lifted and his black nose twitching. Evidently while he was coolly



"EVIDENTLY WHILE HE WAS COOLLY SURVEYING US, HE WAS WEIGHING HIS CHANCES"—Page 174

surveying us, he was weighing his chances. We did not rush in on him, for a raccoon is an ugly fighter, and his bite is vicious. Ranger and Drum now came to our assistance, striking the straight trail and speeding joyfully toward us; but still the raccoon stood looking at us, with one forefoot upraised. I thought I saw in the delicately featured face of the raccoon a look of ancient craftiness, mingled with scorn of the loud-mouthed hounds and their clumsy masters. A second later he turned toward the water, paced sedately out on a little strip of sedge, and then very quietly took to the water.

He swam swiftly and gracefully, in marked contrast to the hounds, which plunged in awkwardly after him. He had a good twenty-foot start, and the water was only sixty feet wide; we did not see how Ranger and Drum could overhaul him, and we began to move up the edge of the Mainfield, in order to circle the flooded corner and come round on the other side. Then we saw Solomon come to a stop, just about halfway across the water. He had brought himself up against an old cypress stump that stood with its top flush with the level of

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the water. We had caught perch and warmouth under its roots in the springtime. On that the raccoon climbed, turned to face the dogs, crouched, and waited for their coming.

Drum had entered the water first, and he reached Solomon some distance ahead of his mate. Of course we expected to see the hound crawl up on the slippery submerged stump and give the coon a battle royal. We should have followed the dogs into the water, but we knew that the stump stood up out of the big rice-field canal, and therefore was not accessible. So we merely shouted to the dogs, and looked upon the strangest game that I have ever seen played.

The raccoon, squatting apparently in the water, cunningly awaited the coming of his pursuer. When poor Drum swam within reach, Solomon's shapely black hands reached out, took him firmly behind the ears and shoved his head under water. Drum's back came up like a cork and his tail waved wildly. Solomon held him under for a minute; then he shoved the helpless creature firmly down the current that eddied past the stump. When Drum rose, half drowned and dazed, he was several yards

away, and Ranger was just being grasped by Solomon. Ranger, although a larger and stronger dog, suffered the same fate as Drum. He struggled desperately, but the coon held fast; and when Ranger had served his term under water, he, too, was thrust aside. Drum now came dubiously back to the attack, swimming close and barking, with his mouth half full of water; but he did not come near enough for Solomon to touch him. Ranger surprised and disappointed us by using the same tentative tactics. Round and round they swam, barking valiantly enough, but positively refusing to be ducked again.

"Dat is no raccoon," said Prince, at last, casting an anxious look toward the graveyard; "dat is a Token."

By that, he meant that Solomon was supernatural. We did not think that, but we recognized in Solomon the wisest wild creature we had ever seen.

After making a dozen useless circles and doing a good deal of futile barking, the dogs swam back to us; for no dog can swim very long, especially if he is using most of his

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strength in baying. When they landed they seemed ashamed, lay down on the dry pine trash with their heads on their paws, and looked up at us. Clearly, as far as they were concerned, the fight was over. Forty feet out in the water sat Solomon. The moonlight silvered the tips of his ears and the rings on his tail. He was out of our reach, and he knew it. Crafty, crafty Solomon! So we left him there, not knowing what else to do.

That same night we caught a small coon near Bellefield; but never after that night did we molest Solomon. He roamed at pleasure over Sam Hill, and foraged when he would in the cornfield. Prince expressed our feelings when he said:

"When a raccoon, or any critter, has as much sense as Solomon, I want him for my friend."

XIV

THE BIRDS' BALLROOM

IT was in the month which followed our introduction to "Solomon" that a sad accident caused us to find recreation in a unique and most interesting way.

One whole wing of the rambling old plantation house was occupied by an ancient ballroom, which doubtless had been indispensable when the house was built in 1730, but it had never been more than a playroom for us. It was sixty feet long by thirty feet wide, and the height of its ceiling was prodigious. A narrow wainscot circled the room below the windows, and above them, twenty feet from the floor, there was a wider and more elaborate one. It projected a foot or more from the wall, and was beautifully fretted with all kinds of intricate carving. Above this high cornice the ceil-

ing was vaulted. On the walls between the windows were tall mirrors, quaint and faded. On one side of the room was a cavernous fireplace, lined with old blue delft tiles, which pictured wonderful adventures by land and sea.

In such a room we used to romp as children on rainy days; and at Christmas time the little negroes would gather there to receive their presents. One summer, I remember, we packed the tobacco for shipment in the ballroom. I could not reconcile the rich, oily smell of the wrapper leaves with the faint and far-off odor of silk and brocade that seemed the traditional aroma of the great room.

Once my brother Tom and I used the room as an asylum for the lovely migrant birds that came near perishing that winter from the cold.

Early in December Tom, while shooting Wilson's snipe with a friend from Charleston who understood very slightly the nature of a gun, had been shot in the side at close range; and for weeks we despaired of his life. Finally he was able to get about in a dressing gown, but old Doctor Graham forbade him to leave the house. Of course he soon became restless

under the confinement, and we were kept busy trying to think of ways to amuse him. I hesitated to tell him what I saw on my frequent trips to the woods and fields, for my tales appeared to make him more restless and unhappy. For a long time I tried to think of a way to bring the fields and the woods to him; and at last nature herself came to my assistance.

We awoke one January morning to find the ground covered with snow and ice. The trees were jeweled heavily with sleet, and their branches creaked in the bleak wind that was bearing down on us out of the north. Snow is very rare in that latitude; and on the few occasions when I had seen it fall a warm rain had soon followed, and had carried it away at once.

But this was a genuine snowfall, actually come to stay. Great was our excitement and great the mistrust of the negroes, who always believed that any extraordinary freak of weather foretold disaster. As soon as I could get dressed and have breakfast I hurried out to the back porch, where I found Prince waiting for me. He knew well that there would be an adventure for us on such a morning.

"Boss, the Mainfield's full of ducks," he said, "and I see four woodcock by the plum thicket. I most ketch one," he added, with a grin.

I was turning back for my gun when father came out of the house.

"Where to, son?" he asked.

I told him about the ducks and the woodcock. "I suppose the ducks don't mind it much," he said, "but I wouldn't shoot the woodcock or any other birds. They are too numbed to show you a clean pair of wings."

I saw his point, and so did Prince, who took away any disappointment I might have had by laughing, and saying:

"Mas' Henry is as good to little buds same as if they were chillun."

"But, Prince," I said, "what are we going to do to have a good time?"

Prince rolled his eyes and shuffled his feet.

"Le' we go down and ketch them woodcock fo' show Mas' Tom," he suggested. "They don't have much sense," he added, with his slow smile.

At first the idea seemed odd and impossible, but the negro reassured me.

"If my foot don't slip dis morning," he said, "I will sho ketch some scandalous big woodcock."

Crossing the open inclosure and passing the stables, we came to the dense little thicket of wild-plum bushes, near the path and adjacent to a pine thicket. Suddenly Prince cried out:

"Dar's one! See him settin' yonder? He looks like the picture of the chief justice he-self!"

I did see him "settin' yonder," with his prodigious length of bill, his round, unwinking eye, and his beautiful black and rufous feathers. And I marked, too, in the "grave and stern decorum of the countenance he wore," the likeness to the old chief justice whose portrait hung in the library. No other bird, except perhaps the eagle, has so much dignity as the woodcock.

Cautiously we now approached, much closer than I had ever been to a live woodcock before. Yet this prince of the woodland did not fly; he sat there in the snowy dead leaves, with his head and bill drawn back against his body and

his big eyes looking steadily at me. When I was within a few feet of him he moved in a half-dazed way, ruffled his feathers and tried to rise.

But he was too cold to take care of himself, and a low-branching limb struck him back to the earth. In a moment I had seized him, and he did not struggle to escape. It may have been fancy, but I thought he snuggled down comfortably when I put him inside the big pocket of my hunting coat.

In just such a way Prince and I caught four other woodcock, several robins,—probably more overcome by the intoxicating berries of the wild-orange tree than by the snow and cold,—a cedar waxwing, and two song sparrows. These we bore back in triumph to the house.

Tom saw us coming, and met us eagerly at the door. I told him to hold out his hands, and I put into them one of the woodcock. He could hardly believe his eyes, and it did my heart good to see him so greatly delighted. As a place to keep our birds until after the cold snap, he proposed the ballroom; and mother,



"SOON THEY BEGAN TO HOP ABOUT, PECKING AT GRAINS OF RICE THAT WE HAD SCATTERED ON THE FLOOR"—*Page 185*

only too glad to give Tom pleasure, readily gave her consent. So off we marched with our willing, half-frozen captives. We opened all the shutters in the ballroom, stopped up the holes in the broken windowpanes, built a roaring fire of live-oak and lightwood, and then, one by one, carefully took the birds out of my coat.

The temperature of the room was high enough to thaw them out quickly, and soon they began to hop about, pecking at grains of rice that we had scattered on the floor. The woodcock did not hop; they walked. Their dignity of carriage was positively enormous. Before long the room was as warm as on a summer's day, and the song sparrows, which from the first had been cheerily pecking at the rice, now flew to the window sill, where, to our delight, they gave little trills of exquisite song. Their fearlessness was characteristic of all the birds we caught; none of them seemed at all afraid of us.

We decided that we must have a regular supply of the food to which most of the birds were accustomed; so Prince and I hitched up the ox, Cain, in the single cart and drove out to the

Wood Gate to get some holly berries and whatever else we could find. Not far from the inclosure we came on a beautiful holly tree twenty feet high and burdened with berries. We cut it down and loaded it on the cart. Farther on we gathered great branches laden with berries from tupelo, black-gum and cassena trees; we found also several fine bunches of mistletoe, quantities of smilax, and an abundance of both red and black swamp-brier berries.

We turned happily homeward, and for the first time in my life I remember noticing the crunching of wagon wheels in snow. Near the gate I saw a bird lying on the ground, and at a little distance there were several others huddled in a fence corner. Prince and I caught them easily; the one proved to be a beautiful little Southern yellow throat, the others fox sparrows, exquisite in their brown mottled coats. It was a great delight to us to take them out of their misery into the warmth and cheer of the welcoming ballroom.

As we drew up at the front door we saw Tom watching us from the window. I soon transferred my little captives to him; then Prince

and I lugged the tree, the vines and the broken boughs into the house. The holly tree we stood in one corner of the ballroom, while the smilax and the swamp vines we festooned in great green loops between the windows. Above the windows we nailed the tupelo and the black-gum limbs, and the long mantel we decorated with the scarlet cassena boughs. The first birds to take advantage of their new surroundings were the robins; they flew into the holly tree, where they hopped about, picking at the berries, and occasionally giving a few droll notes of a song of long-past summer. The woodcock retreated sedately to far corners; one took up his position beneath the holly, where I saw him lower his brown wings, spread his white-tinged fantail, and strut about like a Lilliputian gobbler.

Our birds' ballroom appeared so successful that, urged by Tom, Prince and I made half a dozen trips that bitter cold day to the fields and woods near the house. In the dense shrubbery between the house and the river we captured a golden-crowned thrush that was trying feebly to pick at some wild-orange berries. A little farther on we gathered in a yellow-throated

warbler, a chickadee and three waxwings. In a clump of frozen pokeberries near the old smokehouse we caught two catbirds. As cold and wretched as they were, they showed a shy intelligence, and even after we had them in our grasp they seemed to question with their bright eyes our right to seize them. Out beyond the stable, in the desolately brown cotton field, we rescued a dozen or more sparrows—vesper, savanna and white-throated. A ruby-crowned kinglet we found lying under a cluster of blackberry canes, and at first we were afraid that it was frozen; but it proved to be one of the liveliest of our guests. Besides those, we picked up many others.

We now had a fine collection, and as the cold spell would apparently continue for some days, we prepared to enjoy their companionship. At night we carefully put out the embers in the chimney, so that the birds should not fly toward the fire. Whenever we entered the room during the day we did so very carefully, although not stealthily, for a cunning approach will startle a bird far more than a natural one. The shyest of our little visitors, as soon as they had re-

covered from the effects of the cold, betook themselves to the high cornice above the windows; from that proud elevation they peeped over at us below, as if we were intruders on their private domains.

After three happy days of watching and feeding our pets, the snow vanished under a warm rain; when the sun came out balmy and pleasant, we opened two windows to release our friends. They soon felt the currents of fresh air inviting them, and with little persuasion they left us—tamely, however, and with the reluctance of good manners. The fact that they did not fly wildly away gave us silent evidence that they appreciated our shelter. Many of them sat near the windows in a big live-oak, preening their feathers and sunning themselves. The woodcock we caught and dropped out of the window; they whirred off on whistling wings to the dark fastness of the shrubbery.

Such was our birds' ballroom, and such the way in which Prince and I succeeded in bringing the best that was in the woods and fields to Tom. And ever since then the three of us have felt in closer friendship with the birds; and they,

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understanding our feeling, have appeared to regard us with more confidence. We learned from that experience that one can come fully to sympathize with wild life only when that life has been seen under varying conditions—in distress as well as in happiness.

XV

THE GREAT FEAR

IT was a very fortunate thing for all of us that when we had to face the Great Fear, my brother Tom had almost recovered from his wound; for that was a day when we had dire need of all the help that could be mustered.

Plantation life has its fears as well as its hopes and delights, and the greatest of these is the fear of fire. I remember the big bronze bell that hung in the live-oak tree in front of the house, the ringing of which would send forth the dread news of fire, and summon all the negroes on the plantation. On no other occasion was it to be rung.

Three times I heard the bell sounded. Twice the fires were small ones, and were put out with

little difficulty. What impressed me more than the fires was the devotion of the negroes, who left their houses in "the street," a mile away, and came running to our help. I remember the peculiar thudding sound that their bare feet made on the hard clay paths leading through the fields; far off we heard it, like the running of a drove of deer through pine woods.

The third fire happened in the middle of the day, when a bright February sun was shining, and when every negro on the place was close at hand, thrashing rice with flails.

Now that the thrashing machine has come into such common use, the flail for rice is seldom used. After the ripe rice had been sickled and brought out of the fields, "toted" on the brawny backs of negro men and women,—often there was rivalry to see who could bring out the largest load,—it was stacked in long rows in the barnyard, where it could stand until a convenient time offered for thrashing it. The only injury it suffered during that period was occasioned by the birds that ate away the grain from the tops and sides of the stack.

I have seen on a rice stack more birds of dif-

ferent kinds than at any other place. Cardinals and blue jays, red-winged blackbirds, swamp sparrows, wood thrushes, brown thrashers, towhees, and many others joined in the banquet. It was their custom to resort to the stacks morning and evening; and we never molested them, for they did little damage, and their companionship meant much to us.

It used to amuse us to see the way the mocking birds, which despised rice, preferring rather the sweet crumpled berries of the pride-of-India tree, pokeberries, wild-orange berries, and the like, used to scold the furtive banqueters. From the crests of cedar trees crowned with smilax they would call harshly at the feasters; and if one flew near, they would dart out angrily at him and drive him away. Although the mocking bird is one of the most exquisite of singers, he is also irritable, ill-tempered, and tyrannical. The artistic temperament appears to overbalance his reason.

It is his habit, except in the mating season, to choose for his home a vine-woven tree or a dense thicket; and here he is always to be found. A flash of white and gray feathers will reveal

him as he slips silently into the dark fastness of his retreat; if a feathered intruder should approach, out he will fly in a fury, striking and berating his victim, and often pursuing him far across fields.

On that February day, as on most days when we had the chance, Tom and I were watching the thrashing. The humming thud of the beating flails; the joyous cries of negro children chasing one another about the stacks and in and out through the holes in the paling fence; the fragrance of the rice straw; the singing of the women, who kept time admirably with the beating of the flails; the touches of color here and there in a dress or a kerchief; the bright sunshine; the heavy-headed rice brought in golden sheaves from the stack, and spread out on the hard clay to be thrashed—each sight and sound had a share in making a scene of happy animation.

There was Prince, swinging his flail with a dexterity that made us envy him; there was old Isaac, the plantation sage, with his bare arched chest revealing powerful muscles; there were Sue and Phœbe, and the other women; Paris,

London, and Lisbon—to mention only a few of the “citified” men; among the children, Little One, Neuralgia, and Tom’s Billy were conspicuous.

My brother and I stood leaning against the barn, talking to Henry Snyder, the foreman. Henry had a wonderful control over the negroes; I think they looked up to him as to the chief of the tribe. Every few minutes one of the workers would come up to him and report the number of sheaves he had taken down from the stack or the number of bushels of “rough rice” he had beaten out of a certain allotment; and these figures Henry would tally on a clean cypress shingle. He could neither read nor write, nor could he work the simplest sums in arithmetic; but he had a system of book-keeping that was perfectly effective. As far as we could discover, he never made any error; and his odd hieroglyphics were not only our wonder, but father’s delight, for they were always accurate.

It was while we were lounging there in the sunshine, entertained by the lively scene before us, that there came a cry of “Fire!” from the

house; then sounded the dread ringing of the fire bell. A moment later, Martha, the cook, burst through the gate, waving her apron and her arms, and shouting at the top of her lungs:

"Fire! Fire! The great house is burning!"

Martha was by temperament suited to a highly dramatic entry of that nature; and she made the best of the opportunity. She stood in the path of the running negroes, waving her arms, and shouting louder and louder.

The exit of the negroes from the barnyard must have been remarkably rapid; for although Tom and I jumped the paling fence and raced toward the house, most of them were there when we arrived. Some of them were staring; many of the women were wailing in the minor notes peculiar to them. To their skirts clung the frightened pickaninnies. Henry we did not see. Father was standing on the back steps, giving hurried orders to a group of eager men. As we ran up, we saw the flames leaping above the roof; then beside the flames there suddenly appeared two men, Henry Snyder and Joe Vandross, who was by far the surest-footed man in a dangerous place that I ever knew.

These two had gone up through a trapdoor in the garret, and were attacking the fire; and the sudden hissing, smothered sound, followed by the renewed crackling and the rolling of dense volumes of white smoke, told us that the first water had found its place. To add to the intense excitement, the great bell kept clanging, to carry afar the dread news that Hampton House was burning.

The great danger from plantation fires lies in the fact that those great old houses are like tinder. They are solid, but they are as dry as powder, and in them a fire goes wild in no time. On the Hampton roof there was a tufty growth of gray lichens, which caught sparks easily. The cypress shingles of the roof, which for the most part had been there since the house was built two centuries ago, were dry and inflammable. On these, in the middle of the day, when no one had been watching or suspecting trouble, a spark had dropped; and now, as we looked, a great black hole yawned in the roof, and out of it poured smoke and red flames.

All was now turmoil and excitement. Father

called to Tom to stay with him, and to me to direct the river end of the fire brigade, which even then had almost formed. Meanwhile, all the water on hand in the house had been used, and the rain barrels had been quickly emptied; until the buckets from the river should come, the fire would burn fiercely and uncontrolled. Down the gravelly path to the creek I ran; halfway down, the first full bucket passed me, with the water in it heaving and flashing as it was passed from hand to hand.

When I reached the landing, Prince was standing up to his waist in water, sinking the buckets as they came, and passing them easily with his long and powerful arms to Will, who in turn sent them on to Paris, and so they went up the line. Women as well as men helped with the arduous work. Seeing that I could be of no assistance where every one seemed to understand his business, I raced back up the slope toward the house; and through the smoke and flames I saw my brother on the roof with Henry and Joe. He beckoned to me, and up the steps I bounded, past the toilers on the dark, hushed stairways, flight after flight, until I came to the

perpendicular ladder that led through the trap-door to the roof.

Once on the roof, I realized the whole situation. The air was filled with hot smoke, and with showers of live and dead sparks; there was a crackling going on all the time, and under that a deeper and more sinister sound—a sullen roar that we knew must be coming from the heart of the fire, the depth of which would probably determine whether the house would have to go. If it should have to go, there would pass with it not only the house and its contents, but its rich traditions and associations. There General Washington had spent happy days; there Francis Marion had made his remote headquarters, from which he had struck many a deadly blow at the British; there had lived a signer of the Declaration of Independence and a member of the Continental Congress.

At an ordinary fire, things are saved while the fire is being fought; but on a plantation, all hands attempt first to save the house; if they fail to do that, they carry out everything that can be moved. In that way, in the Daisybank fire, the fine furniture brought over by the

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Huguenot Horrys had been saved. In the fire at Eldorado, the fire fighters had waited too long, and the loss had been great. And it was now becoming a question with us whether it would not be wiser to save all we could while there was yet time.

Tom was stifled and dizzy with smoke; so I took his place by the edge of the red-and-black crater. As I waited for each bucket to come, I could see the long line of faithful negroes toward the river toiling on steadily, and hear their shouts. In front of the house, under the big oak, some of the older negro women, helped by little children, had begun to carry things from the house. As they glanced up toward the fire, I could see the distress on their features. Across the distant fields I could see negroes running, whom the bell had summoned from Romney, Elmwood, and other plantations. Martha was now ringing the bell in a wild frenzy of excitement. Her red bandana was askew, and her apron was on the ground.

The flames had now eaten a hole twenty feet wide; the shingles, pine scantlings, and big yellow-pine roof beams offered rare fuel to the fire.

Great clouds of black smoke eddied up from the hole in the roof. I did not see how we could possibly stop it; and that father shared my opinion was evident from his frightened, almost piteous expression. Word came up from below that a negro had slipped on the wet stairs, and had hurt himself so severely that he had had to fall out of line. I saw one negro woman sink exhausted on the ground. There was no one to take her place, and the work for every one in the line was increased.

Even the dexterous Joe, who had worked savagely and silently, now began to show the effects of his exertions. Henry's face was worried and haggard. He had said no word since coming on the roof, but, like Joe, was toiling desperately. Crawling on his hands and knees, he beat out with a wet sack the flames that were creeping toward the caves. Father stood at the mouth of the trap, taking the buckets as they came up, passing them to me or to Tom in his turn; Tom and I passed them to Joe, who was trying to fight the far side of the fire.

Suddenly there was a crash that filled the air with sparks and cinders. The three big

beams through which the fire had burned had given way, and the whole burning mass had collapsed into an attic room below. The roar of the fire was abated; and down below us we heard the shouts of negroes, beating out the flames. The red rim that bordered the cavernous black hole the four of us beat out, greatly encouraged by those below us, who had the upper hand of the fight.

Fortunately, the roof had caught in no other place; spark by spark the last smoking ember was put out. We worked doggedly on until all was over. Presently we began to descend the stairs, triumphant but unspeakably tired from the excitement and the strain. The negroes were trailing back to the barnyard, when father sent word to them by Henry that dinner would be sent to them from the great house, and that there would be no more work that day.

The next day, the merry tattoo of Joe's hammer sounded from the roof; and before long, we had nothing to remind us of that time of great stress and imminent peril except the new patch of shingles, and the lasting gratitude in our hearts toward the negroes.

XVI

ON LONE PINE RIDGE

IT was the month after the fire that my brother Tom and Prince faced, on Lone Pine Ridge, a greater fear than even the threatened destruction of the old plantation home had been.

Lone Pine Ridge is only a fragment of what was once a tall and stalwart rice-field bank. Formerly, it had been high enough to defy the floods of the mighty Santee, wide enough at the top for a wagon-track, and safe enough to guard a fortune in the fields behind it. But that was in the period of its perfection; since then the structure had been neglected, and year by year the water had eaten its way into the huge dike. In several places the river had broken through. The fields that it formerly guarded had long since been abandoned. The top and

sides of the bank had rotted and crumbled in the rains and the sun until freshets covered the whole stretch, including the Pine Ridge, although that was always the last to go under.

On the small, sandy hillock at the point farthest from the mainland, where the big bank made an angle to follow the river, there towered the Lone Pine that gave the ridge its name. It was the survivor of a fine group that with their lacing roots had once bound together the strategic bend of the bank; the repeated encroachments of the water had swept the others one by one into the river.

When the tide was not high and the bank was not too sticky, it was possible to walk out to the ridge. It was a beautiful walk in the spring, when blue and white violets carpeted the sides of the scarred old bank. In winter we shot wild turkeys that flew across to the ridge from Laurel Hill Swamp, a vast, impenetrable cypress swamp beyond the Santee. Cattle often strayed out on the long bank, for the grass there was green and tempting. They sometimes went as far as the river, and occa-

sionally one would become bogged in the mud-flats, and lose its life.

It was after a stray cow that Tom and Prince went out to the ridge of the Lone Pine one bitter afternoon early in March. Father and I had gone to Georgetown to get some seed-rice.

Tom had missed the young brindle cow from the stable-lot. He tracked her down to the edge of the rice-field; from there the trail followed the straight bank. Then he went up to Prince's cabin, and called the negro boy out.

"Prince," he said, "that brindle's gone over to the ridge. We'll have to get her back before sundown."

"Yes, sah," replied Prince, with a grin. "I 'spect dat ole lady's gone clear to the ribber."

"It would be just like her. There's a rise to-day; that's why I want to get her back. There's thirty feet at St. Stephens; you know that means high water for us."

Together they started out on the bank. A fine drizzle was setting in, and a bitter wind moaned over the dreary waste field. They shivered with the cold; they slipped in the

muddy path; they jumped across puddles of yellow water. Just before they came to the ridge, they saw where the cow had been badly mired in a deep cut; the muddy freshet water was creeping in where she had floundered.

At the beginning of the ridge they separated, and each followed an edge. Through marshy bottoms filled with the tart scent of calamus-roots; across bogs netted with slippery roots; through blackberry thickets and greenbrier tangles,—good cover for swamp rabbits, but difficult going for men,—they forged their way. Tom flushed several woodcock, and almost forgot his errand in the delight of drawing imaginary sights on those aristocrats of the shadowy swamp.

Prince, who had an eye for humbler things, started a big brown-tail rabbit, that bounded into a heavy clump of underbrush. Prince picked up a gnarled pine limb, and softly followed his prey. He peered into the tangle, and not seeing the rabbit, stepped cautiously into the bushes. Suddenly his foot broke through a thin covering of leaves, and he plunged down into a deep stump-hole. His arms flew out, and

clutched at the air. His whole weight came down on his leg with a shock. There was a snap, then a groan of agony, and Prince sat back on the edge of the hole, gripping his leg with both hands in a pitiful attempt to allay the deep pain of it—for it was broken above the knee.

Prince had never before been sick or injured. His acquaintance with any kind of pain was small indeed; so now his wrecked body sent a blind, indignant protest to his hot brain.

"O Mas' Tom," he muttered, "come quick!"

But Tom was half a mile away, trying to raise a fat woodcock that he had sighted. He lost several minutes in the effort, and came out of the thicket and to the edge of the river without having seen again either the prize woodcock or the missing brindle cow.

"I wonder where Prince is," he said to himself. Then he shouted, "Prince! O Prince!"

The waves of the river lapped against the muddy banks and lisped through the marsh; the wind moaned through the bare trees; a lonely plover called out of the bleak sky; but Prince did not answer. He had tried to call once or twice, but his voice had sounded so high and

strange that it frightened him. When the sick faintness swept over him, he thought that he was dying. As he closed his eyes, he murmured, "Good-by, Mas' Tom! I hope you will find dat cow." But as the shock gradually wore off, the pain increased.

Tom, growing anxious, continued to call as he broke through the brush-canec along the bank. But the sweep of the waves and the rising wind kept his voice from carrying far. Finally, when he came near where the Lone Pine stood, he heard a faint moan, then Prince's voice: "Here I is, Mas' Tom!"

Tom vaulted a high log, and crashing through the brush, came suddenly upon the negro. Prince tried to smile, but his face was drawn with pain. Tom knelt beside him, and supported him with his arm. He saw the angle at which the negro's leg rested, and knew at once what had happened.

"Never mind, Prince," he said. "I'll get you home to a doctor; he'll fix you up all right."

"Mas' Tom," Prince answered, very seriously, "you has sho' been a good boss to me. If I die—I's gwine to tell the Lord about it."

"Oh, never mind that," said Tom. "Don't you worry. You aren't going to die. I can get you home all right."

"You can get home, cap'n," said the negro, using a term that with him was one of great endearment, "you can get home, but not Prince. How about dat freshet?"

Tom started at the word. He had forgotten the rise in the river. It was more than a mile from the Lone Pine to the mainland, and it was now near sundown. He remembered the big break where the cow had been bogged, and how the water had been rising there when they crossed. An hour had passed since then. With the strong east wind backing up the tide, its rise would be rapid. To make matters worse, no one knew where they were. Tom had missed the cow at the lot, and had gone straight to Prince's cabin; no one had seen them leaving for the ridge. With night approaching and the river in flood, with no shelter from the cold, and no footing from the freshet, they were indeed in desperate case.

"Cap'n," protested Prince, and he feebly tried to push away Tom's supporting arm,

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"you must be gwine now. I hear de water rolling over dat bank. You must go, cap'n. Prince ain't afraid."

Tom did not answer; he was thinking that the wrath of the river and the powers of darkness could not make him leave Prince. Peril is a great leveler; and they who had been master and field-hand were now two men in danger of their lives. Tom knew well enough that he could get to the mainland alone. He would have to do some wading, and perhaps might have to swim across one or two of the deep cuts. During lulls in the wind he could hear the steady, sullen roar of the water as it rushed over the bank. But by going immediately he could not hope to reach the house before dark. Then what next? A rescuing party in a boat? But the only boat on the plantation had been rented to a shad fisherman the week before. Meanwhile Prince would have to be left alone on the ridge. Tom had an active imagination, and now it tortured him. He saw the cold water creeping up through the darkness, laying its insidious fingers on the helpless negro, who even now was shivering.

"Are you cold, Prince?" he asked.

"No-o, sah."

Tom stripped off his coat, and wrapped it about Prince. Then telling him that he would return in a few minutes, he rose and walked to the river. The flood was brimming the broad stream from bank to bank. Tawny yellow waves broke hissing before the east wind. The water had almost covered the sear marsh. Tom was bitterly cold, there in his shirt-sleeves, facing the raw wind. But he was not thinking of himself.

He left the river, and cut rapidly across the ridge toward the head of the bank. Above the noise of the wind in the cold trees he could hear the steady roar of the water rushing through the breaks in the bank, and now and then between the stems of the box-elder bushes he caught glimpses of the streams. When he came to the first sluice, he saw that although he could probably cross it by himself, he would not be able to get Prince across. By the low sun, glowing red under the rain-clouds, the gray expanse of delta land looked wild and strange. Familiar sights were fading, and in that weird

light of the stormy sunset the landscape took on a spectral appearance.

As he stood there alone, Tom invented one plan after another. Each seemed to rise in inspiration, to shine in hope, to darken in doubt, and to disappear. The sullen sun set behind the clouds. The wind blew harder than before, and the cold became more intense. The sinister tide swept higher, higher. It was then five o'clock; by six, only the little hillock out of which the Lone Pine rose would be dry; by eight o'clock the whole ridge would be submerged. Tom was numb with despair.

He heard a sound behind him, and turning, cried out at what he saw. For there lay Prince. He had crawled from the place where he had been injured; and he was now so faint with the exertion that he could not speak. He beckoned Tom over to him.

"Oh, please, cap'n," the negro whispered between labored gasps for breath and strength, "oh, please, cap'n, don't you wait for me!"

Tom sat on the sodden leaves beside the negro, and drew Prince's head and shoulders on his knees. "I shall stay with you, Prince,"



"'OH, PLEASE, CAP'N. DON'T YOU WAIT FOR ME!'"—*Page 212*

he said. And Prince was too weak to make further protest. Meanwhile the winter twilight gathered gray and chill; the rush of the waters grew fainter; wild ducks came into the rice-fields for their night feeding. The deep gaps in the bank were now running brimful; escape was cut off. Fitfully the wind moaned through the trees, and as silently as a beast of prey the water crept up through the brier thickets, and closed in on the two boys. A mile away in the great plantation house a faint light glimmered. Tom knew that they were just lighting the lamps at home, and that soon his mother would begin to wonder where he was.

A few minutes passed; then, far-off, there sounded a drumming, throbbing noise.

Prince stirred slightly. "Dat's Jordan a-rolling, cap'n."

Tom listened with strained ears. Then he gently lowered Prince's head to the ground. He thought he recognized the sound, but he was not certain. Breaking through brush and briers, sinking over his knees in water, he stumbled, rose, and fell again, while the flood

grew deeper, and the panting of a steamer's engine grew louder. When he came to the spot where the Lone Pine stood, he saw the *Thistle* plowing down the river, swept on by the flood.

He locked his arms about the great tree, and climbed up until he was clear of the shrubbery; then, clinging to the bare trunk, in full view of those in the steamer's pilot-house, he snatched off his hat and waved it, at the same time frantically shouting and beckoning.

The heavy craft swung ponderously about; she headed up-stream under half-headway, and sent off a boat.

They brought Prince out of the thicket, where they found him lying partly in the water. That night a doctor set the broken leg, and both Tom and Prince slept at home.

The Lone Pine still stands on the ridge. To Tom, it is a monument to Prince's loyalty; to Prince, it is the mark of the place where Tom saved his life. I can never look at it without remembering that, truly, many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.

THE END



